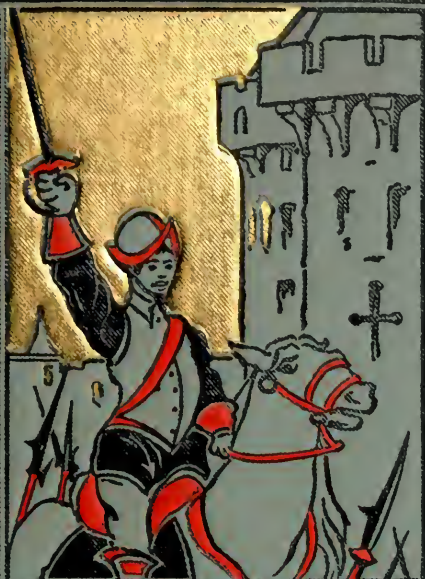




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THE DRAGOONS OF LA GUERCHE

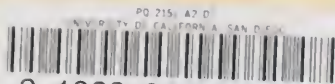


BY AMÉDÉE ACHARD





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"Gentlemen," said he, "I have need of a hundred men of will."—p. 160.

THE DRAGOONS OF LA GUERCHE

BY AMÉDÉE ACHARD

Translated from
the French

BY RICHARD DUFFY



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The Dragoons of La Guerche

CHAPTER I.*

A DESPERATE RESOLVE.

The Thirty Years' War had reached that stage of fury which was to lay Germany waste with sack and pillage. It was the hour when the best and bravest generals of Europe met face to face and made of death the sole recognized king from the Elbe to the Danube, from Pomerania to the Palatinate. Two figures dominated the epoch, Gustavus Adolphus, the hero-king of Sweden, and Wallenstein, the master and the sword of the old German Empire. What events might not issue from this stupendous clash of arms!

In the midst of the unleashing of these passions, in this whirlwind of blood we return to the personages who figured in "The Huguenot's Love." We shall follow them through new adventures, through intrigues and combats, some of them inspired by rancor and hatred, others by devotion and love. It is with Mademoiselle de Souvigny and Mademoiselle de Pardaillan, Count Pappenheim and Count Tilly, John of Werth and Mattheus Orlescopp, the Baroness of Igomer and Margaret, Magnus and Carquefou, Armand-Louis and Renaud, that we shall once more beat about the shores of the

* "The Huguenot's Love," of which "The Dragoons of La Guerche" is the sequel, is published uniform with this volume by Howard, Ainslee & Company.

Baltic to the plains of Lutzen, running across castles and cities in our way.

It will be remembered that Armand-Louis and Renaud had spurred their steeds towards the camp of the King of Sweden in pursuit of their sweethearts. At this time Gustavus Adolphus, with some thousands of men, was in the vicinity of Potsdam. He was endeavoring by the most eloquent remonstrances, propped by divers pieces of artillery which he discharged against the city, to wean away his father-in-law, the Elector of Brandenburg, from his alliance with the Emperor Ferdinand. It was exceedingly important to him that there should be no hostile city between the heart of Germany and the shores of Sweden which might place obstacles to his retreat in case of reverses.

Neither the remonstrances nor the pleadings of Gustavus Adolphus in favor of the German Protestant princes, whose independence was imperilled by the House of Hapsburg, had any effect upon the astute heart of George William. The pieces of artillery produced a better and more profound impression. According as they increased in number, the Elector of Brandenburg showed himself correspondingly disposed to come to terms.

When the King of Sweden grew tired of this dilatoriness, which cost him so much precious time, he directed the mouths of his cannon full upon the palace of his father-in-law. The latter, at once convinced by the excellence of this argumentation, agreed to serious negotiations.

Unhappily for the cause which the King of Sweden had entered Germany to defend, Gustavus Adolphus was not the only one acquainted with the parleys which kept him one day at Potsdam, another in Berlin. Duke Francis-Albert knew from day to day what was said in the councils of the king, and day by day he informed the Commander-in-chief of all details. Count Tilly, almost certain that Gustavus Adolphus would not issue from his enforced inaction as long as he had not overcome the passive resistance of George William, decided to strike a decisive blow and capture Magdebourg, whose

archiepiscopal prince had sought the Swedish alliance, placing his little army under the command of Thierry of Falkenberg, one of the lieutenants of the young king.

He hastily gathered the troops, which were scattered in the vicinity, and, urged on by the impetuosity of Count Pappenheim, who burned to try his mettle with the Hero of the North, he suddenly presented himself in the free city at the same time that Armand-Louis and Renaud reached the presence of the Marquis of Pardaillan.

When the two young gentlemen entered the Swedish camp the news that Magdebourg was threatened had just been received.

Twenty-four hours later a courier rode up, announcing that the city was invested. He was accompanied by a fellow messenger. But while the one, sent by Christian William, the Protestant Archbishop of Magdebourg, sought the king, the other, guided by Carquefou, requested to see the Marquis of Pardaillan, whom he found sick abed.

The unexpected information that Magdebourg was being attacked excited the rage of the king, at the same time that the dispatch borne by Benko filled the soul of the Marquis of Pardaillan with terror. Gustavus Adolphus beheld a check upon the cause for which he had drawn his sword; the aged Huguenot thought only of his daughter and adopted child, exposed to all the horrors of a siege, which, on account of the name of the man who had undertaken it, assumed a most ominous aspect.

His wrinkled features livid with forebodings, the marquis summoned to his side the two young Frenchmen, to whom he exhibited the message of Magnus.

"They have escaped one most horrible danger only to fall into another more frightful still," he said.

"God gave them back to us only to take them from us," cried Armand-Louis.

"Oh, but Magnus is a lucky wretch," murmured Renaud. "To think that he should have been there and not myself. Nevertheless I'll hug him with all my heart when we get into Magdebourg."

"When you get into Magdebourg!" the marquis interrupted. "With whom do you expect to enter?"

"With King Gustavus Adolphus, I fancy, and I assume that the dragoons of La Guerche will be the first to pass through the gates."

"What, do you talk of the king? Would you see me so sad if His Majesty were going to strike camp and march against the enemy? Oh, don't hope for that! Count Tilly alone is before Magdebourg; he alone will enter the city."

"You believe then, that Gustavus Adolphus, the prince to whom you have consecrated your entire life, will not fly to the aid of a city that has given itself up to him?"

"Oh, do not accuse him. How can he leave when his father-in-law, the Elector, haggles with him over a stronghold and reserves for himself the cursed chance of attacking the Swedes, in case they suffer a check, so that he may obtain a more advantageous peace from Emperor Ferdinand."

"Do you think, then, that Magdebourg will not be aided?" asked Armand-Louis, turning pale.

"Magdebourg will not be aided at all unless by me!"

The Marquis of Pardaillan made an effort to seize his sword and stand up, as he spoke, but an atrocious pain forced him back to his seat. "Oh, what unhappiness! Only a father could lend them aid, and this wretched father is reduced to impotence."

"You are mistaken, Marquis," interposed Armand-Louis. "Mademoiselle de Pardaillan and Mademoiselle de Souigny, to whom I have plighted my faith, shall not be deserted because your age and illness are traitors to your courage. Renaud and Armand-Louis will replace you."

"To be sure," cried Renaud, "and that most speedily."

"You are going?" asked the marquis with emotion, as he took their hands.

"You do us injury to doubt it," replied Armand-Louis. "We will have left camp within an hour. I ask your permission to see the king, who may perhaps have some order for me to bear to the general in command at Magdebourg."

"I cannot say whether we'll save the city," added Renaud. "The aid of two men is not a great deal; but as long as life is within us, never believe that your daughters are lost!"

"I shall never forget your words," returned the marquis, who extended his arms and clasped the two Frenchmen long and tenderly to his bosom.

As they were leaving the tent of the marquis, and while Renaud was wiping his eyes, they encountered Carquefou, who was polishing the hilt of his rapier with the sleeve of his leather cloak.

"Sir," began the honest valet, approaching Renaud, "I have long ears and as a consequence I hear even when I don't listen. Why did you tell the Marquis of Pardaillan just now that you had the aid of two men only? Don't you count me or, in your opinion, am I only half a man? One may be a coward by birth, by character or by principle and not be the less brave when occasion requires. Now I am going to prove this to you when we are under the walls of Magdebourg. This said, Sir, permit me to go and make my will, for 'tis sure as the sun that we shall never return from this expedition."

Armand-Louis left the care of preparing all for their departure to Renaud and went to the king. His name opened all doors for him. He found Duke Francis-Albert with Gustavus Adolphus. The duke appeared to be studying some maps and plans which were spread out on the table.

At the sight of the Saxon, the Huguenot recalled the warning of Margaret. To the gracious smile of the duke he replied with a cold bow, then in a high voice, he said: "I do not come hither, Sire, in the interest of my service but of my personal affairs. May I hope that Your Majesty will be good enough to accord me a private interview of a few moments' duration?"

"I wish to inconvenience no one," interposed the duke, frowning. "I leave, Count of La Guerche."

Armand-Louis bowed without answering and the duke moved away.

"Ah, you do not like the poor duke!" exclaimed the king.

"Sire, you like him too much," returned the Huguenot.

"If such words fell not from the lips of a friend," retorted the king haughtily, "I should tell you, my dear Count, that I am the only judge of my likes."

"A person whose devotion Your Majesty cannot doubt, a woman who was praying for Gustavus Adolphus the day the fleet left Sweden's shores, did not like the duke any more than I do. Need I name her—Margaret!"

"Ah, Margaret told it you!" exclaimed the king, nervously. "I knew it. He inspired her with terror. Nobody about me loves this poor duke; but he is the friend of my childhood. One day I wounded him cruelly—"

"Sire, do you believe that he has forgotten that?"

"It is enough that I remember it to pardon him for remembering it. My foremost duty is to try by every means to efface the trace of this outrage."

Gustavus Adolphus walked up and down the chamber once or twice and then asked:

"What subject calls you hither? What do you desire of me?"

The Huguenot understood that he must abandon the matter of their first words.

"Mademoiselle de Souvigny is at Magdebourg. At this moment there's a truce. The imperial troops, commanded by Torquato Conti, no longer hold the country and are scattering in all directions. My presence is useless here; therefore I am going to Magdebourg."

"To Magdebourg! Why cannot I accompany you!" exclaimed the king.

"I have come to inquire of Your Majesty whether there is any order for me to bear to Thierry of Falkenberg?"

"Tell him to hold his post till the last extremity, to burn his last cartridge, to fire his last ball! Let him defend the inmost wall and die on it, if necessary. By the faith of Gustavus Adolphus, as soon as liberty of action is allowed me, I'll lend him the help of my sword."

"Is that all?"

"All. Stay, assure him that if I were not chained here by the Elector of Brandenburg, I should have arrived with you in Magdebourg."

The king tossed the maps and plans on the table with a violent gesture and added menacingly :

"If the Elector, George William, were not the father of Eleanor, there would not have been a stone upon a stone in Spandau six weeks ago and my cavaliers would have dug their horses' hoofs in the streets of Berlin."

"I beg your pardon, Sire," interposed Armand-Louis, taking a step toward the door, "but my hours are counted. I must go."

"Good luck, then," replied the king, extending his hand. "Ah, you are a happy man."

"I have a request to make to you. Your Majesty alone knows whither I go. Will Gustavus Adolphus keep this knowledge for himself alone?"

"Not even reveal it to the Duke of Lauenbourg, is not that what you mean?" said the king, smiling.

"Above all, not to him!"

"Your business is yours. I shall keep my counsel," answered the king with a shade of displeasure.

Duke Francis-Albert was not in the gallery which led to the king's chamber. Armand-Louis saw Arnold of Brahé there.

"Ah," exclaimed the Huguenot, "I find the face of a friend when I feared that of an enemy. A double good fortune!"

Then drawing him into the embrasure of a window he added :

"Do you love your king as you love Sweden?"

"He is my master by birth, my master by choice. My life and blood are his."

"Then watch over him."

"What is wrong?"

"There is a man whom the king loves and who hates the king."

"The Duke of Saxe-Lauenbourg?"

"Not so loud! When this man is in the king's chamber, be afoot at the door with your hand on your sword-hilt. If he goes hunting with the king, ride close to them. If some expedition calls the king far from camp, do not lose sight of the other. Let him understand that a devoted heart is there and that faithful eyes survey his

every action. He's a coward, perhaps he will dare nothing. On my faith of a gentleman, if I speak to you thus, it is not without grave reason."

"Fear not. I shall walk in his shadow. I shall breathe his atmosphere," replied Arnold, clasping the Huguenot's hand firmly.

When night fell, three men, after a hard gallop, were far from the camp. They followed the road which leads from Spandau to Magdebourg.

"Ah," the Duke of Lauenbourg said to himself, who had not again seen the Count of La Guerche, "if Captain Jacobus were here I should have let him loose on the track of this cursed Frenchman."

CHAPTER II.

MAGDEBOURG.

If three cavaliers might not traverse the long distance between the Swedish camp and the city beleaguered by Count Tilly without risking certain perils, dangers trebly great awaited them at the approaches to the imperial camp. The keen surveillance of countless cavalry patrols about the city allowed none to enter or leave Magdebourg. Every man captured by them stood a good chance of being run through by a sword. More frequently a pistol ball ended his examination before he had an opportunity to reply. A cordon of sentinels, relieved from hour to hour, made all communication between the city and the surrounding country impossible. It was therefore not a slight undertaking to enter Magdebourg, and neither Armand-Louis nor Renaud underrated the fact.

The roar of cannon in the distance soon apprised them that they were now separated from the city only by a narrow stretch of field and forest. This formidable noise seemed to inspire them with an even greater ardor and they boldly spurred their steeds ahead. As they issued from a wood they perceived deep columns of infantry advancing toward the new part of the city, whence mounted clouds of smoke zebraed by red flames. Platoons of cavalry guarded every road, fifty pieces of artillery thundered on the plain, and riderless horses ran wild from all sides. Some corpses stretched in the plain showed that not all balls and bullets had been spent. Far away the ramparts of the city were crowned with fire. The forts which defended the approaches to the city bore on their summits the colors of the emperor.

"They are preparing to attack the place," said Armand-Louis.

"Many are the legs that will be broken this evening," Carquefou murmured philosophically, meanwhile making a careful scrutiny of his pistols.

He was too well acquainted with his master not to know that there could never be any fighting in his neighborhood without his taking a part in it. As if their noble steeds understood the secret intention of their riders, they continued to advance at a slackened pace.

Armand-Louis lost nothing of what was going on about him. The cavalry patrols, as well as the sentries, were all interested in what was taking place about the city.

In a few moments Armand-Louis, Renaud and Carquefou should have attained the outposts of the imperial army. A few soldiers, struck down by grape-shot, lay dead in the field. Armand-Louis lightly dismounted and put on the green belt which had decorated the body of an officer.

"Now that's not bad," said Renaud, as he remarked the action of his friend.

He dismounted, as did Carquefou also, and looking around them, they had little trouble in finding the objects of their quest.

"Now for a bold dash," said Armand-Louis.

"And at a gallop," added Renaud.

"Oh, I knew it would come to this," cried Carquefou.

They spurred their horses and set off at top speed. Two or three sentries turned to look at them. One even lowered his musket, but when he noticed the green belts he shouldered it again.

A cavalry patrol beheld the three hardy adventurers pass and did not doubt but they belonged to the major body of the imperial army.

Farther on a company of infantry was halted in a causeway which they had to traverse to reach the burning suburbs.

"Order of Count Tilly!" cried Armand-Louis, who rode ahead.

The company opened ranks.

"I thought I saw the throats of a thousand wolves," said Carquefou when they had passed.

They had crossed the outposts of the camp; another spurt bore them to the entry of the suburbs, where the ranks of the imperial troops were all disordered. The wounded were lying on the walls, others groaned as they were carried away by their comrades. Several wild balls began to shatter the plaster of the houses in the neighborhood.

"Hello, friend!" cried Armand-Louis to a lansquenet, "have they burst in the gates of the city?"

"It rains shot," answered the soldier, "but the gates hold firm. These cursed shop-keepers keep a hell-fire upon us from the top of their ramparts."

"Forward!" said Renaud.

"Oh, but this is fine sport," murmured Carquefou, "the shot of our friends catches us on the nose and the shot of our enemies in the back."

They soon found themselves among the first columns of the attack. The carnage was terrible. They were fighting under the very walls of Magdebourg. It was evident that the suburb which Count Tilly chose for attack that day would remain in the power of the assailants. To save part of his garrison, which had been overcome by superior forces, the officer who commanded that post, had just opened a postern. Perfect waves of men were to be seen gathered about this postern. Iron and lead made great holes in their number, but, like the waves on the shore of the sea, other waves replaced the ones which disappeared. The conquerors wished to enter with the conquered.

Aloft, and wielding a battle-axe with the vigor of a forester felling trees, John of Werth split the skulls of all before him. The captain had been supplanted by the soldier. In the city before him, had not Mademoiselle de Souvigny taken refuge?

"God's day, we're done for!" moaned Carquefou when he recognized the baron.

Renaud would have leaped to the side of John of Werth but Carquefou restrained him by main force.

"Marquis," he said, "do you forget that we are like Daniel in the lion's den. Don't have us die before our time."

Before the postern, buttressed on his stout legs, stood Magnus, swinging his musket around his head like a war-club. Each time that the bloody weapon traced a circle, a man fell. A void was being made about him.

"Our salvation lies there!" added Carquefou, pointing out Magnus to Renaud.

But the marquis was delirious with the fever of battle.

"To hell with this rag!" he roared as he tore off the green belt. Then, whirling his sword, he charged upon a captain of the lansquenets.

Armand-Louis was thick in conflict with two imperialists, who barred his way to the postern. Magnus perceived him. A terrible leap landed him in the midst of the Austrians and his bloody musket barrel knocked down two more victims.

A handful of determined men had followed him. The fire from turret and rampart was redoubled. The assailants retreated somewhat and a broad, naked spot lay between them and the postern.

"Follow me!" cried Magnus.

Armand-Louis, Renaud and Carquefou, who with lowered head struck everybody in their way, joined Magnus almost instantly.

"Now to the postern!" roared Magnus.

"He talks like a sage!" growled Carquefou still wilding his sword as they retreated.

Through the wreck of the garrison they made impetuously for the wide-opened postern, behind which a troop of Swedes was ready to receive them. At this moment John of Werth recognized the trio.

"Ah, the bandits!" he shrieked.

In the twinkling of an eye he had calculated the distance which separated him from the fugitives. But they were beyond him now. Turning to the group of soldiers which surrounded him he roared:

"Fire!"

But the fugitives had all passed within the ramparts. The heavy doors of the postern rolled upon their hinges and a few hurtling balls rebounded upon the ironbound planks of oak.

"I think we got here in time," said Carquefou. Mag-

nus did not lose a minute in conducting Armand-Louis and Renaud to the house at which he had sought a lodging for the two young ladies upon their arrival in Magdebourg.

The time had passed when they used to go to the window, anxious and curious at each noise in the street. How many pieces of cannon had they not counted as they were drawn past the house by the citizens! How many patrols and companies rushing by full of ardor for the fray, and returning wounded and blackened with powder. The shrieking of shells or the whistling of bullets still made them quake, but no longer terrified them. They understood now the perils from which the courage and resolution of Magnus had delivered them. They thanked God; and judged the burning projectiles which filled the city with ashes and ruins to be less terrible than the Baroness of Igomer or the Convent of St. Rupert.

Their hours were passed in conversing of their betrothed. What were they doing? In what territory were they now seeking them? Had the messenger sent by Magnus yet reached them? To be sure the two young gentlemen must be suffering greater anxieties than they. At times they thought it could not be long before they should see them; but so sweet a hope suddenly filled them with affright, when they recalled the thousand dangers their lovers would be exposed to in this beleaguered city. They would be surely the first in the fight; and moreover, were not the men who directed this hail of shot against Magdebourg named John of Werth and Henry of Pappenheim? The memory of these two implacable enemies made the cousins pale with fear and foreboding.

"Heaven grant that they may not come hither," said Adrienne, when all these dangers passed before her mental vision. But the prayers which the two maidens addressed to heaven were rather timid. They felt themselves quite alone, and if a stray shot should kill Magnus what would become of them, left in a city delivered up to all the horrors and hazards of a siege in which they had neither kinsfolk nor friends.

As soon as the halls prepared for the wounded had begun to receive their blood-stained guests, Adrienne and

Diana, amidst the women of the city, lent themselves to the succor of the fallen soldiers. Their delicate hands became accustomed to dressing the most horrible wounds. They dwelt amid cries and groans. They spent long nights between walls where moans of agony banished all sleep. Ah, but how far removed from this were their happy days at St. Wast!

When other young women came to relieve them at the pillows of the sufferers they returned to their apartments, where they made bandages or melted shot.

At the very hour that Armand-Louis and Renaud appeared before Magdebourg, Adrienne and Diana had just received their relief after a whole night in the hospital, which death visited every minute. Despite the formidable thunder of the strife, which bloodied one of Magdebourg's gates, the two cousins had retired to a little room whose narrow windows looked out upon the garden. They were both in silent meditation, while filling a large basket at their feet with lint. At times their hands rested, a sigh swelled their bosoms and their eyes would be pensively raised heavenward.

The detonations of the artillery succeeded one another every minute. A sudden clamor in a neighboring street indicated to them that a wounded man was being brought to his family. Then they would shudder and resume their pious labor, which had suffered the interruption of a momentary dream.

Gradually a silence fell; now only at intervals was a cannon heard, the final shots of the ending battle. Then footsteps were heard in the street and almost immediately afterward the knocker of the door was let fall heavily.

"Dost hear?" asked Adrienne, springing from her chair.

"'Tis Magnus," returned Diana, who felt her cheeks turn pale.

"'Tis he," said Adrienne, "but he's not alone. Who can be with him? Who is there to come here?"

Meanwhile hurried steps clattered on the stairway.

"God is good, he has heard our prayers!" cried Diana.

"Ah, thou knowest them as I do. 'Tis Armand!"

"'Tis Renaud!"

The door was pushed open and four men, whose garments were stained with dust, powder and blood, burst into the room.

Before they could utter a sound Armand-Louis and Renaud were at the feet of Adrienne and Diana.

Incapable of standing alone, Adrienne leaned on the shoulders of Armand-Louis.

"You are cruel," she cried, "you would have me tremble for your safety every hour."

"Is it life to live separated from you?" asked Armand-Louis in transport.

"Thou knowest my love for him," added Adrienne, looking upward, in an utter exaltation of soul, "if it be Thy will, Our Saviour, to join us in death as we have been joined in life, may Thy holy name be blessed and Thy will be done!"

"Come here," said Magnus to Carquefou brusquely. "Baliverne has done a deal of work to-day. I must have a chat with her."

"And the Shiverer shall not take ill a little refreshment," replied Carquefou. "I feel her fainting on my hips."

Recovering from the emotion of the first few moments and again mistress of herself, Diana was threatening Renaud with her pretty finger. He remained kneeling before her in speechless adoration and joy.

"I can understand the Count of La Guerche's return," she said, rallying. "It is enough to see his attitude to her to understand the motives which urged him hither. But why did you follow him to Magdebourg?"

"I do not know," replied Renaud, troubled.

"Oh, what an innocent! Well, if you do not know why you came you had better leave at once, for the country is unhealthy. It rains bullets here and the wind is the color of fire. The Count of La Guerche has a right to live here. Something keeps him here and he is willing to lose all to remain with this something. But the Marquis of Chaufontaine! Ah, fie! if he should receive a scratch we could never forgive ourselves."

"You send me back?" asked Renaud, scarcely able to breathe.

"To be sure, if you have no good reasons for remaining here."

"But, Mademoiselle, I love you, I adore you!" cried Renaud beside himself.

"Are you quite sure of that?" said Diana gravely.

"Am I sure of it? I would sacrifice ten thousand lives to spare you a tear. I no longer belong to myself since I first saw you. The castle of St. Wast, where you dawned upon me, captured my heart and has kept it. I'm almost mad, it is true"——

"Almost?" interposed Diana, smiling.

"Well, if you wish, wholly mad, and something more. There is no stupidity or extravagance of which I am not capable. There are days when he who addresses you is a perfect villian. Oh, sweet heaven, what a confession 'twould be, did I tell all! Collect all the faults and all the imprudences of the world, combine them in one and you have me. But I love you, and at the height of my follies, when my heart and my head have the bit in their teeth, if you made a sign, a single sign, you would see me at your feet like a child. Armand can tell you. He has seen me. Ask him what he thinks of my fever. I believed in the beginning that I had convulsions. I spared nothing to heal myself. Oh, nothing, I swear. But nothing could cure me, neither travels nor bottles, neither time nor absence, neither this nor that, nor the things I do not tell. Had I any need to love you, let me ask you? But this love is like a nail which one strikes. Each day it sinks deeper. It is like a charm which you have cast upon me. In faith, I've done my share, now you must do yours. Henceforward you will see me eternally near you, and if some day, in punishment of my sins, which are, alas, rather numerous, you drive me from your presence, I do not know whither I shall betake myself, to the land of the Indians, or to declare war on the Incas of Peru, and I shall be killed in some barbaric isle, while crying out your name to the savages about me."

"Well," replied Diana, "now that I know your reasons for coming hither, I fancy that some day I may myself be called Madame de Chaufontaine."

Renaud gave a cry that rang through the house. He attempted to stand but burst into tears.

"Ah, tears are good," said Diana, offering him her hand. "No words can equal them, and as I see them, I also dare tell you, Renaud, that I love you and shall never love any but you!"

CHAPTER III.

THE PROPHECY OF MAGNUS.

That same evening Armand-Louis went to Thierry de Falkenberg, who was at the town hall and imparted to this officer the instructions Gustavus Adolphus had given him in their brief interview.

"Oh, I will hold the city as long as I can," said the Swedish officer, "but can I hold it long?"

He then informed Armand-Louis that signs of discontent began to show among the inhabitants of Magdebourg. Some regretted their stifled commerce, others, the consequences of an attack in case fate betrayed their arms. The place was suffering much under the fire of the besiegers.

"Had I not two thousand soldiers of the Swedish army and a body of volunteers determined to resist till the bitter end," added M. de Falkenberg, "Magdebourg would already have opened her gates."

"You know what the king, your master, desires," returned Armand-Louis. "The word surrender must not be spoken."

"It never shall while I live, I swear to you."

Armand-Louis and Renaud investigated the interior of the city and the ramparts. Everywhere they found the evidences of long conflicts, portions of the walls in dust, houses riddled with bullets, disemboweled towers, smoking ruins; everywhere, a gloomy population; no more songs or shouts, but women and children weeping in the churches. The suburbs, invaded by the Imperialists, were a heap of wreckage, lighted up here and there with flames.

Nevertheless, though the enthusiasm of the first days had fallen, the defense was equally energetic and vigilant. The army of Tilly, having mastered the forts and the suburbs, had dealt cruel losses. The best regiments, which had been so often led to victory, were decimated; and a

goodly number of excellent captains had lost their lives in these murderous affrays. No part of the belt of wall which encircled Magdebourg was broken. Its artillery replied unfailingly to the Austrian artillery. The generals of the enemy who found the oldest troops in their hands hesitating, began to believe that they could never take this rebel city by main force.

To recommence the assault after the check at the postern would have been to expose the arms of Ferdinand to a defeat whose consequences were incalculable.

One morning, after a long series of skirmishes which had cost the enemy many lives, the sentinels placed on the highest towers, observed that divers batteries, which the previous evening had been vomiting flame and iron, appeared to be disburdened of their engines of destruction. There were no soldiers about these deserted batteries. Carquefou, who was on guard close by a postern, hung a rope from a spike and let himself down into the trench.

"Faith, 'tis so much the worse," he said to his comrades. "Fear gives way to curiosity."

Several resolute men followed him into the burned suburbs, and gliding nearer and nearer behind fragments of the walls and along the trenches, at last reached the outposts of the Imperial army. Its lines were no longer so tight about Magdebourg. The army had retreated some distance.

The news of this unexpected retreat traversed the city like lightning. Everybody rushed into the streets and questioned those who had gone as scouts to reconnoiter the positions of Tilly's army.

"I advanced timidly to the site of that great battery, whose top you can see beyond on the down," said Carquefou. "God knows I was ready to run like a hare at the first alarm. The hurdles had been overthrown, the parapets knocked down, the cannons carried away. I could see naught on the plain but a company of cavaliers behind a curtain of trees.

A hundred civilians flung their caps in the air.

"They're going away!" was cried upon all sides, and the happiest of them fell to embracing each other.

"If they're going away," said Magnus, "the moment is come for us to keep a watchful lookout."

The veteran was glared at in astonishment.

"Don't you understand?" they said. "The Imperialists are beating a retreat."

"I understand, perhaps, and that is why I say, if you do not watch by day and by night, some fine morning the Croats will be in Magdebourg."

The civilians laughed at him.

"The Trojans laughed also when the daughter of Hecuba spoke," retorted Magnus, "and Troy was taken and reduced to ashes."

Nevertheless, he desired to learn what Carquefou had discovered. Armand-Louis, who was ever thinking of some means to restore the young ladies to the Marquis of Pardaillan, together with Renaud, accompanied Magnus, hoping to find some road passable.

For a long time they followed the lines of circumvallation, which had been occupied by the enemy the evening before. Not a single breastwork but was abandoned.

"Some deserter must have told them," said Magnus anxiously, "that we have the forces to take and keep them."

"Magnus believes in nothing; not even flight," returned Renaud, who was already foretasting the pleasures of the journey he should undertake with Diana.

"Count Tilly has never taken flight," said Magnus. "If he retires at times, it is his fashion, like the tiger's, in order to make a better spring."

All three forged ahead in search of an open way. But behind a hedge they discovered a cordon of infantry; in the depths of the woods, a squadron of cavalry; in the centre of villages and farms, regiments. There was no trace of rout, no wagon overturned, no piece of artillery abandoned. Each copse of trees as well as every hollow in the road sheltered a sentinel.

"The Imperial army acts as a wolf when it watches a lamb," said Magnus.

"And in this instance the lamb is Magdebourg, is it not?" asked Armand-Louis.

At this instant three or four shots crashed and a cor-

responding number of balls dug up the earth about them.

"There's my answer," said Magnus.

They returned to Magdebourg, which they found in jovial mood. Bonfires blazed in the streets, tuns of beer and wine were tapped, tables set. Children were singing and dancing, all doors were opened wide. Confusion and clamor reigned everywhere. Some of the notables were talking of a banquet to be given at the town hall to celebrate the deliverance of their valiant city.

"If you cannot induce M. de Falkenberg to command these shopmen to return to the ramparts, Magdebourg is lost," said Magnus.

Armand-Louis hastened to the Governor's palace. It was thronged with an immense crowd. The civilians, freed from their arms, were congratulating one another. The younger men were forming dances in the square. It was with difficulty that Armand-Louis elbowed his way to the apartment of the Swedish chieftain. He found him engaged upon his replies to the last despatches of Count Tilly. A burgomaster, standing upon a table, read them in a loud voice to the magistrates and notables of the city.

Their tone was extraordinarily moderate, although the Austrian commander again summoned Magdebourg to capitulate.

"The cock does not crow so loud now," commented one of the auditors.

"He is beginning to understand that our walls are not made of gingerbread," said another.

"The old wretch must have caught cold in our trenches," said a third.

"His doctors must have ordered him a change of air," added his neighbor.

With a superb disdain the burgomaster flung the dispatches on the table, amid the laughter and raillery of the assembly.

"Henceforward Count Tilly will know of what stuff Magdebourg is made," said the burgomaster.

"And ye, Magdebourgiens, remember the fate of Maestricht," said Magnus.

All eyes were cast upon the old soldier. A shudder ran through the room.

"One night not long since, Maestricht believed itself saved," pursued Magnus. "The enemy was retreating wearied of vain attacks on the ramparts. The next day Maestricht was taken. If you do not wish to wake up in fire and blood, then, men, be on your guard!"

A messenger entered, bearing news. He had seen the Walloon regiments of the Pappenheim corps on the march toward Schoenbeck.

"They were followed by a large body of artillery," he added.

At these words a great tumult broke out in the hall. They thought no more of the warning of Magnus, save to mock at him.

"If you are sick, friend, don't drink, but at least let us make merry in peace," cried the burgomaster.

"Plague upon the one who won't have us enjoy ourselves," said another of them.

"Comrade, if you are afraid at Magdebourg, then set out for Maestricht."

Each one vied with his neighbor to launch a jest, but while some of them chattered, others, having paid a visit to the cellars of the hall, charged tables with bottles and pots.

"Good appetite to ye, sirs," said Magnus. "I will not sit at a funeral feast."

In the meantime Armand-Louis had approached M. de Falkenberg and had informed him of what he had seen and of what he suspected. The Swede frowned and glared about him.

"I know," he said. "I know; but nobody here is in a condition to hear me. Prince Christian William himself, who will lose his head if Magdebourg be taken, is riding about the city in holiday attire. I shall deem myself fortunate if I can keep a few hundred men at my side. The merry-making fever is in the air. It has infected even my soldiers."

The captain pointed to a band of Swedes tipping glasses with the citizens in the square under his window.

Armand-Louis and Renaud left the town hall more

sorrowful than when they had entered it. Magnus spoke no more. Each street they passed through offered a holiday sight. Musicians, seated on casks, scraped their fiddles to the lissome steps of dancing youths and maidens. Hundreds of tables set in the open air, received the thousands of guests. Passersby were invited to sit down and drink. Every hearth was blazing. Not an empty glass was to be seen. The nostrils of Carquefou dilated; he fondled his stomach tenderly with his hand as he passed the kitchens. Here he accepted a glass of Rhine wine, yellow as gold; farther on, a wing of roast capon, brown and deliciously crusted.

"They eat and you eat with them!" muttered Magnus, glancing sideways at his comrade. "Oh, unhappy one! To-morrow the enemy will be in Magdebourg."

"That's just my reason," replied Carquefou. "I won't have the Austrians or Croatians find a bone to put between their teeth," and he buried in his pockets all that he could not swallow.

When night fell Magnus saddled the horses of Adrienne and Armand-Louis, and flung under the beasts' noses a bushel of oats. Carquefou scrupulously followed his example.

"We must neglect nothing that is good," he said, "neither wines nor precautions."

Soon afterward the steeds of Diana and Renaud had no cause to envy their neighbors. They were saddled and had double provender in their troughs.

Armand-Louis and Renaud took good care to conceal their fears from the young ladies. Magnus might be mistaken in his forebodings, and in any case it were useless to cause them a night of alarm, which the morrow alone could dissipate or justify. They advised them, however, to be ready to leave at the first rays of the rising sun.

The merrymakers prolonged their festivities far into the night. The post which M. de Falkenberg had prudently placed along the ramparts to warn the garrison in case of need, gradually disappeared. The soldiers, still faithful to the countersign, but worn out by many libations, fell asleep, one after the other. Silence followed song and soon naught was heard in the city bound in

sleep, save the vague and indescribable noise of some good citizens making staggering endeavors to find their homes.

Silence reigned in the countryside as well. The dying bivouac fires lighted the horizon here and there when their flames were whipped by the wind.

Meanwhile, at that undecided hour when pale flashes of light spread out in the heavens and made the scattered trees and houses in the plain issue composedly from the darkness, a low rumble arose in the distance. It was regular, such as would be caused by a body of troops on the march.

Magnus, whose anxiety prevented sleep, was wandering about the gates. He kicked a sentinel and asked him:

"Don't you hear anything?"

The sentinel hearkened for a second and burst out laughing. Then he answered: "'Tis the Croatian cavalry making away. 'Good luck,' they're saying to us."

Then pillowing his head on the back of a snoring comrade, he closed his eyes.

The same noise continued in the distance. At one time Magnus thought it was moving away.

"'Tis some witchery!" he said to himself. A wavering white line on the other side of the Elbe made him believe that a cavalry corps was leaving the Imperial army.

"Can Count Tilly be really beating retreat?" murmured Magnus. "Yet he's said to be a good general and I've seen him at work."

He climbed upon the crest of the rampart and gazed into the distance. Nothing disturbed the tranquillity of the devastated country. Not a man showed himself; but by dint of scrutiny, Magnus thought he could distinguish the uncertain movements of a troop of soldiers in a copse, which stood on the horizon. Further, it seemed to him, that a thin black line, whence issued divers shafts of brilliance, was crawling along the windings of a hollow road.

The sun arose and flooded the plain with light. A man appeared at the end of a path, running breathlessly. He leaped quickly into the trench, seized with both hands

a rope which dangled from the top of the wall and scaled the rampart with the agility of a cat.

Magnus thrust himself before the man, in whom he, at this instant, recognized Carquefou.

"'Tis true I've a good appetite, but I've also good legs," said Carquefou. "I took a fancy last night to have a stroll in the neighborhood of the Imperial camp. I know the road, having crossed it a horse in broad day. I thereupon slipped along as far as the bank of the Elbe, below there. Ah, the wretches, they are all astir!"

"The Imperialists?"

"God's death, to be sure! I'm not talking of the Swedes. Artillery, cavalry, infantry—all are marching together. I recognized Count Pappenheim on horseback, wearing his cuirass and leading ten regiments. The cavalymen have their sabres in their fists, the infantry their pikes or their guns on their shoulders. They'll reach Magdebourg before an hour's time."

"And you are bound at this pace, whither?"

"To M. de Falkenberg."

"Thou art a man, Carquefou!"

"Who knows? Who knows? I'm afraid of being caught like a hare in his burrow, that's all."

Carquefou and the veteran hurried on their way, stumbling over these evidences of a holiday which was to be followed by so sinister an awakening. They had hardly gained the doors of the town hall when the crash of musketry was heard from afar.

"Alas, 'tis too late!" said Carquefou. But Magnus, drawing his sword, leaped up the stairway of the castle, yelling:

"To arms! To arms!"

While talking they had reached the next street. Between tables and benches citizens were sleeping heavily and barred the way. Magnus and Carquefou kicked some of them, crying:

"To arms! To arms! The enemy is coming!"

Two or three of the sleepers awoke and stood up drowsily. One of them recognized Magnus.

"Ah, the man of Maestricht," he said, and promptly dropped down to dream again.

"Oh, what fools, who have eyes and do not see, ears, and do not hear!" exclaimed Magnus.

CHAPTER IV.

WITH FIRE AND SWORD.

At the cry raised by Magnus, M. de Falkenberg, who, surrounded by his officers, had been on the watch, leaped outside. Repeated charges of musketry thundered in the new city. The sound of the tocsin was now mingled with them.

"To arms!" repeated the Swede, then gathering the handful of soldiers and volunteers he had beside him, M. de Falkenberg rushed onward to meet the enemy.

As they reached the end of the square they met Armand-Louis and Renaud, who, while retreating, were animating a group of surprised and routed citizens to advance to the fray.

The sight of the Swedish uniforms gave courage to the citizens. They stopped.

"Forward!" commanded Falkenberg, flinging himself first upon the Imperialists.

"Forward!" repeated Armand-Louis and Renaud.

The burgomaster, half frightened out of his wits, had followed Falkenberg. He caught sight of Magnus, who was brandishing Baliverne.

"Ah, why did I not believe you?" he groaned.

"The time for weeping is past and steady now and let's make holiday with our swords!" returned the veteran.

"And later we'll make holiday with our spurs, if we get the chance," added Carquefou.

Before them were the Walloon companies, led to the assault by Count Pappenheim. At the first dash they planted the colors of the Emperor upon the ramparts of the new city, while John of Werth, at the head of the Bavarian regiments, struck at the opposite side of Magdebourg.

The attack had been made with as much promptitude as skill; after a decoy retreat, this was a rapid and terrible return. The tactics foretold by Magnus had in reality been the strategy of old Count Tilly; the execution of them had been confided to his most daring lieutenants, at the head of his best troops.

Almost without striking a blow they had reached the heart of Magdebourg on a gallop; but then they met Falkenberg and his Swedes.

Electrified by their example and that of Armand-Louis and Renaud, who rallied to the charge the soldiers and volunteers they had collected, they broke the first ranks of the Walloons and drove them back to the ramparts.

But new cries arose at the other side of the city. The ominous crash of musketry resounded more rapidly and more loudly every minute. A great number of the fugitives flung themselves amid the Swedes, filling the air with clamors of terror.

A man, whose breast had been pierced by a bullet, fell at the feet of Falkenberg, saying, "John of Werth!"

Then he gasped and died.

Armand-Louis and Renaud looked at each other. Before them Count Pappenheim, behind them John of Werth. Their two implacable enemies were united to conquer them. They were thinking of Adrienne and Diana.

"We must not separate now," said Armand-Louis to Renaud. Then, addressing Falkenberg, "Sir, do you see to Count Pappenheim and his Walloons. We'll attend to John of Werth and his Bavarians."

At this moment Magdebourg was a fearful spectacle. Women and children, dragged from their slumber, ran hither and thither in the streets and squares, where the citizens, deprived of their leaders, sought to reunite their forces. Most of them took refuge in the churches, whose domes resounded with shrieks. The bells rang madly, calling all citizens to defend the common cause. Musketry shrieked from all sides simultaneously. Volleys of bullets, landing at the crossways, struck down hundreds of wretches who augmented the confusion by their groans. Already gruesome flashes of fire illuminated

several quarters of Magdebourg. Long columns of smoke mounted to heaven, while the flames approached ever nearer. New and more numerous hordes burst into the city; driven back, they returned to the charge with more furious impetuosity and their mass rendered the resistance of desperation all in vain. That which the battleax did not destroy, the torch devoured. The cannons of the city, turned around upon the city, vomited destruction upon it. Whole rows of houses crumbled in clouds of cinders. All that came within reach of sabre or musket perished. Horror and awe were at the height, when the gates forced inward by cannon balls, opened a passage for the Croatian cavalry. It came like a torrent, wrecking all in its path.

At the end of an hour the horses were pawing in blood.

Meanwhile Armand-Louis and Renaud held head against John of Werth. Magnus and Carquefou were in the foremost rank. The Bavarians found themselves before a wall of bronze. From time to time Magnus looked behind him. This astonished Carquefou. A band of harrassed but ever fighting soldiers appeared at the corner of the street. Magnus recognized the Swedish uniform. Falkenberg was not there. Magnus knocked over a Bavarian who persisted in attacking him and leaped toward the Swedes.

"M. de Falkenberg?" he asked of a young officer, all covered with blood.

"An Austrian ball killed him," replied the officer.

A thunder of wild shouts burst on the air. The Walloons pressed forward. Magnus rejoined Armand-Louis, saying:

"The city's lost!"

"Eh?" said Armand-Louis. "Then let's make one more effort and save those confided to our care."

All four, Armand-Louis, Renaud, Magnus and Carquefou rushed forward and fell upon the Bavarians, breaking their ranks as a battering ram breaks a wall. An empty space lay before them.

"Honor is saved!" cried Armand-Louis, "now to the gallop!"

Then all four disappeared down a little street. A few

minutes later, grouped about Adrienne and Diana, they were seeking a means of escape from the burning city.

At this crisis, the unhappy defenders of Magdebourg who still stood, resisted only to sell their lives dearly. Each soldier fell in turn. The Croatians, spread broadcast, leaped a horse and rode into the churches, pitilessly massacring the flocks of kneeling women. Their sabres never wearied.

Pillage followed carnage. A terror-stricken mob, hunted from the houses, ran wildly through the city, pursued by troops whom the intoxication of victory and blood rendered implacable. They killed for the sake of killing; they burned simply to destroy. Conflagration raged from street to street.

In the midst of this furnace, which had been Magdebourg, Armand-Louis and his companions attempted to open a passage to the gates. But what obstacles in their way! Here a street was blockaded by a fallen steeple, reeking a cloud of black smoke; farther on, a company of Walloons was firing an entire district and driving the inhabitants into the flames at the point of pikes. Yet the four soldiers continued to advance, protected in some wise by the tumult and terror of this work of annihilation. If Croatian or Hungarian cavaliers came dangerously close, the sword of Renaud or of Magnus soon felled them to earth. Adrienne and Diana, all quivering with awe, closed their eyes while their horses leaped over corpses. When a numerous troop of the Imperialists was seen afar off, the fugitives hid themselves behind a smoking wall or under the fallen and smouldering dome of some chapel. The troop once passed, they proceeded on their way.

Suddenly a company of cavaliers rode before them, while they were turning the corner of a still burning building. The riders were galloping behind a man, who wore a doublet of green satin, and who seemed to be their leader. A scarlet plume waved from his grey cap, brushing his shoulder. He had a thin profile, a red beard and the look of a wolf.

"Count Tilly," murmured Magnus. Carquefou crossed

himself, then raising a musket, hooked to his saddle-bow, which he had reserved for a supreme occasion, he said :

"If he turns around, 'tis to look his last on the sun."

The squadron passed. A man galloped up to the side of Count Tilly. A great mantle of green cloth enveloped his form.

"If that's not the Duke of Saxe-Lauenbourg," said Armand-Louis, "it is his phantom."

Carquefou replaced his musket in position, saying: "Here's a ball that loses the chance to lodge itself in the body of an illustrious cutthroat."

They had almost gained the ramparts when a body of citizens, all covered with blood, rushed past them, pursued by a regiment of Imperialists.

"Ah! 'twere better to die here than flee farther," cried one of the citizens.

They all retreated to the bottom of a garden. Armand-Louis glanced about him. Naught could be seen on any side but pikes and muskets, menacing visages and bloody sabres. The torrent of citizens had borne them along into the garden, which was protected on three sides by an old wall.

While Armand-Louis was seeking a breach, a troop of soldiers followed upon the citizens into the garden.

"Death to the heretics! Death to the rebels!" cried a Walloon officer; and a volley of bullets flew, decimating the mutilated ranks of the citizens.

The horse of Adrienne began to rear and fell upon its haunches. Armand-Louis quickly lifted her off and set her behind him on his steed.

"Fly!" he said to Renaud, "I will follow you if I can."

"There's a bit of advice," retorted Renaud, "which I'd make you answer for in the field were there not a thousand murderers crowding upon us from all sides."

But already Diana had come to Adrienne, and seizing her hand, said :

"Thy lot shall be mine!"

They might still cross the walls of the garden and gain the rampart, had it not been that the horse of Armand-Louis suffered from two wounds, in addition to his double burden.

Suddenly Magnus dismounted, and pointing to one end of the street with his sword, said :

"John of Werth !"

"And Captain Jacobus !" exclaimed Carquefou, dismounting in turn.

Then each offered the bridle of his horse to Armand-Louis.

"No ; no ; not at that price," cried the Huguenot.

John of Werth had already caught sight of them and pointing them out to Captain Jacobus, he cried :

"This time they're mine."

Gathering his Bavarians about him, he dashed into the garden. At the same instant another troop of cavalry appeared at the opposite end of the street. Their cuirasses bespattered with blood blazed in the sunlight. They marched in good order, swords erect, following the pace of the chief at their head.

"Ah, Count Pappenheim !" cried Armand-Louis, as he recognized this personage.

"A tiger and a lion," said Carquefou, regarding in turn the Bavarian captain and the Grand Marshal of the Empire.

"Let all follow me !" commanded Armand-Louis in a loud voice.

Bursting out of the garden in the teeth of the Croats and Walloons, striking and felling all who impeded his passage, he opened a bloody path up to the cuirassiers of Pappenheim, who gazed astounded at the havoc four swords had wrought.

"Count Pappenheim," said Armand-Louis to his terrible rival, "here are two gentlewomen whom I entrust to your loyalty. If you are really he who is called The Soldier, save them. As for myself and the Marquis of Chaufontaine, we are your prisoners. Here is my sword."

"Here is mine," added Renaud.

John of Werth had just ridden over the bodies of the citizens retrenched in the garden. He had now arrived at the group formed by Adrienne and Diana.

"At last," he said.

Almost at once his hand grasped the arm of Adrienne,

as the talons of a vulture upon the trembling wing of a dove.

But Count Pappenheim, swift as thunder, rode between the maiden and the Bavarian, saying in an imperious tone :

"Baron, you forget that Mademoiselle de Souvigny is in my care. Who touches her, touches me."

The glances of the two captains crossed with the glitter of swordblades. But Count Pappenheim was surrounded by his cuirassiers, who were devoted to him. John of Werth understood that he could not be the more powerful. He lowered the point of his sabre.

"Mademoiselle de Souvigny, prisoner of a general of Emperor Ferdinand," he said. "I do not dispute her with you. Her ransom will go into the treasury of His Roman and Apostolic Majesty, together with that of Mademoiselle de Pardaillan."

Then bowing to Diana, he added :

"This is a capture which Count Tilly, Commander-in-Chief of the Imperial army and an acquaintance of the Marquis of Pardaillan, your father, will thoroughly appreciate.

Then he retired slowly.

CHAPTER V.

COUNT PAPPENHEIM'S NOBILITY.

The name of Count Tilly, which has been mentioned in the preceding colloquy, had a meaning which did not escape Count Pappenheim. It made the Commander-in-Chief of the army a kind of umpire between Mademoiselle de Souvigny and of Mademoiselle de Pardaillan. John of Werth would not tarry to inform him of what had occurred, and Count Tilly would be sure to assert his absolute authority, thus leaving Count Pappenheim no longer free to act as he should have desired. His first thought was to pay the debt of gratitude he owed Armand-Louis by restoring to him his freedom and Mademoiselle de Souvigny. This would be the most noble means of showing the French gentleman that he understood great deeds and could imitate him in the practice of heroic devotion. But did the young ladies still belong to him, now that the name of His Majesty, the Emperor, had been mentioned?

As he had anticipated, John of Werth did not lose a minute in going to Count Tilly and relating to him the scene of which he had been a witness. The avidity of the terrible general knew no bounds; excited by the riches, which long wars and rapine had permitted him to amass, he thought unceasingly of some means to increase them. Even as he named the two prisoners which fate had led into the Imperial camp, John of Werth hastened to remind Count Tilly that they were connected by blood with the richest and noblest lords of Sweden. If the laws of war gave them to one of his lieutenants, was it not just that a part of their ransom should be given to the generalissimo of the army?

"Further," added John of Werth, "you know that Mademoiselle de Pardaillan, Countess of Mummelberg, by her mother's side, is by birth quite as much a Bo-

hemian as a Swede, and, therefore, subject to his Majesty, the Emperor, our master. She possesses rich tracts in Austria, which have been sequestered. Part of them may be the reward of him who conducts her to the feet of her legitimate sovereign."

The eyes of Count Tilly gleamed with a ferocious covetousness.

"Now," thought John of Werth, "Adrienne will always be within reach of my claws."

Shortly thereafter a messenger from Count Tilly informed Count Pappenheim that the Commander-in-Chief was awaiting him in the very palace Falkenberg had occupied the day before, when it was the scene of so much rejoicing and festivity.

"Do not leave this house," said Count Pappenheim to Armand-Louis as he resumed his armor, "neither you nor any of your friends. The city belongs to Count Tilly; this house belongs to me."

He placed before the door, on which his name was inscribed in chalk, a platoon of his cuirassiers, commanded them to allow entrance to none, no matter under what pretext, and then betook himself to the conqueror of Magdebourg.

It was not long ere the names of the two young ladies were pronounced.

"I was expecting this," thought Count Pappenheim, glancing at John of Werth.

John of Werth was stroking his mustache.

"This is an important capture," Count Tilly continued. "One of the young ladies has wealth enough to save her guardian the trouble of counting it. The other is descended from one of the most considerable families in Germany. Her perversity in heresy, or even some clever arrangement may be reason sufficient to pass the land she possesses into the hands of the crown. Besides, Mademoiselle de Pardaillan is the heiress of a gentleman, who not only is known to be immensely wealthy, but who is also the counsellor and confidant of our implacable enemy. I claim these prisoners, therefore, in the name of my sovereign. They may be able to serve our cause well."

"When he knows they are in our hands," interposed John of Werth, "the Marquis of Pardaillan will surely come to the Imperial camp at once, to treat of their ransom."

"Who can say," added Count Tilly, "whether the hopes of liberating them quickly and without ransom will not induce him to confide to us the secrets of his master? Why should he not reveal the plans of Gustavus Adolphus, when all that is dearest to him in life is at stake?"

"The Marquis of Pardaillan is a warrior," Count Pappenheim hastened to reply, "and he will never do what you yourselves would refuse to do, though you had ten naked swords at your heart."

"Then he'll dive down deep into his coffers and empty them, if he desires to get his daughter and his ward back to Sweden. In default of revelations, which the victorious armies of His Majesty can dispense with, our master, Emperor Ferdinand, will have gold to pay some of his faithful soldiers."

"Gold!" cried Count Pappenheim, looking the old general straight in the eyes. "There was enough of it in Magdebourg to keep a big army for three months. What has become of it?"

The deep-set eyes of Count Tilly flashed, but without replying directly to the question of a captain, whose violence and whose popularity he well knew, he said:

"The dispatch which bears the news of the capture of Magdebourg to Munich and to Vienna contains the names of Mademoiselle de Souvigny and Mademoiselle de Pardaillan among the principal prisoners."

"I do not doubt," added John of Werth, "but that the Emperor will hasten to summon them to his court. They will adorn it with their beauty as the daughters of the Eastern princes adorned the court of Alexander of Macedon."

Since the Emperor Ferdinand was thus informed, Count Pappenheim could no longer think of executing his generous project. This was the stroke of too clever a hand.

"If the Emperor, my master, orders them to his presence, I myself will be the guide and protector of Made-



"Behold, Count Tilly's troops!"—p. 40.

moiselle de Pardaillan and Mademoiselle de Souvigny," replied the grand-marshal.

"They could not be in better hands," cried John of Werth. "I doubt only whether His Majesty will consent to be deprived of the services of a chief who knows how to enchain victory to his sword."

"Oh, Bavaria can furnish captains to replace me."

John of Werth smiled and was silent. He did not despair of yet finding an efficacious means to force the marshal of the empire to separate himself from his prisoners. What was important to him was to see that they were not returned at once to the camp of Gustavus Adolphus.

"I have been told also," said Count Tilly, "that you have two French gentlemen as prisoners."

"The Count of La Guerche and the Marquis of Chaufontaine," added John of Werth.

"'Tis true."

"What a windfall!" commented John of Werth carelessly. "Two desperate enemies to the imperial cause. They shan't appear at court. A good tight lodging in the state's prison will do for them."

"You forget, I believe," replied Count Pappenheim, rising haughtily, "that these two gentlemen gave up their swords to me."

"Ah, I understand," retorted John of Werth, "your intention is to restore to them liberty. That's chivalry—"

"Such as yourself practiced one day; if I remember aright, when you restored his liberty to the Marquis of Pardaillan at the battle of Lutter," interrupted Count Pappenheim.

John of Werth bit his lips. The argument was unanswerable.

"Am I not concerned in this?" cried Count Tilly. "I believe the smoking ruins of Magdebourg which surround us are sufficient proof that I command Magdebourg."

"If you are generalissimo of the army, I believe I am the hereditary marshal of the empire. What I have taken, none dare touch."

"Count, do you know to whom you are speaking?"

"Count Tilly, you are speaking to Count Pappenheim. That much I know."

The two chiefs glared at each other like two lions meeting in the desert to drink at the same spring; the one with all the haughty command with which he was invested, the other with all the arrogance of the race whence he sprung. The same pallor clouded each brow. If pushed to extremes Count Pappenheim might depart and not the whole army could stop him at the head of his cuirassiers; mayhap even a goodly part of it would follow in his train; and it meant risking all to exact all.

"Gentlemen," cried John of Werth, "what boots us the life of two captains, whose ransom is not even ten crowns of gold? On the contrary, it is well that the enemy should know the contempt in which we hold their swords. They will tell the Swedes what fate the army of Count Tilly reserves for whomsoever resists. This surname of 'Invincible,' which it has so long deserved, they'll find it deserves more than ever."

This flattery, adroitly put, banished the anger of the general. A little smile spread over his face, as he returned:

"John of Werth is right. Let the marshal of the empire do as he pleases with the two adventurers, which chance has placed in his way."

The conference was ended. Count Pappenheim slowly returned to the house before which stood the guard of cuirassiers. He had just bearded a man who did not easily forgive, and he knew John of Werth enough to be assured that he would not abandon his schemes, though he had adjourned them. He must therefore place the Count of La Guerche and the Marquis of Chaufontaine beyond the reach of any hostile hand.

His manner, as he entered the room occupied by the two gentlemen, gave them to understand that something had happened. Adrienne and Diana clung close together like two doves at the approach of a vulture.

"You know whence I come," said Count Pappenheim. "Nothing is lost; but you must separate."

"Separate?" echoed Adrienne.

"The name of one against whom I can do nothing, an

august name, has been pronounced; Mademoiselle de Souvigny is the prisoner of His Majesty Ferdinand, the Emperor of Germany. Mademoiselle de Pardailan as well."

Adrienne was too much shocked to reply. Count Pappenheim profited of this silence to relate to them what had passed at the abode of Count Tilly. When they learned that their companions were to be sent either to Munich or Vienna, Armand-Louis and Renaud leaped like two panthers whose hips have been pierced with arrows.

"Both prisoners? And we?" they cried.

"You, gentlemen, are free."

"'Tis treason," exclaimed Renaud.

"There's a word, Sir," retorted the marshal, slightly paling, "which I should make you answer for, were you not my guest. I did all in human power to save you; but I'm not master, nor am I Ferdinand of Hapsburg, before whose name the haughtiest heads bow. Yet be assured, for the young ladies are under my charge."

"And you will answer for them on your life, your honor?" cried Armand-Louis.

"There's no need to remind me of it, Count, but meanwhile, gentlemen, you had better leave."

"So soon?" queried Armand-Louis, drawing near Adrienne.

"The sooner the better."

"What do you fear?" asked Adrienne.

"I fear nothing and I mistrust everything. Do I know what the general in command of Magdebourg will decide to-night? There is a man close to him who hates you all and he may be fertile of evil counsel."

"Oh, go then, go quickly," said Adrienne.

Armand-Louis arose and said shortly:

"Let us understand well. Count Pappenheim is for us, is it true?"

"It is," replied the count.

"We are beneath your roof and I see below me cuirassiers, who, at a signal from their general, would all die to protect this house."

"All."

"But against us we have Count Tilly, John of Werth and an army."

"That is to say, might, machination and spleen."

"Then if we heed your advice we'll leave to-night."

"Within an hour."

"And we'll make straightway for the Swedish outposts?"

"Without looking back."

Adrienne and Diana felt a chill run through them. Armand-Louis and Renaud started.

"Ah, I understand," said the grand-marshal of the empire, "You have a thousand things to say, a thousand confidences to exchange—perhaps even you have to undertake a deliverance which is the sum of all your prayers."

"'Tis true," cried Renaud, "and which we shall obtain with God's aid and our swords."

"Remain then. I allow you a night. 'Tis an imprudence, but perhaps this imprudence will enable me the better to provide for your retreat. Besides, I'll not attempt to combat the counsels of love. My experience has taught me the follies it inspires. Happy we are when they are still only follies!"

This allusion to the incidents of their meeting at La Grande Fortelle caused Adrienne's visage to mantle with a veil of purple. In it Armand-Louis beheld the proof that Count Pappenheim was not the man he had hitherto judged him, and he proffered his hand impulsively.

Renaud, touched by this action, approached the marshal, saying:

"You have in your hands two gentlewomen, whom a good resolution, an impulse of the heart may make free. Are you not of a name to brave the anger of Count Tilly, of a rank to coerce even the Emperor, your master, to respect? Say the word and these two women will bless you."

Without answering Count Pappenheim threw open the window violently, then said:

"Behold!"

The two young men, behind whom Adrienne and Diana grouped themselves, saw by the light of flame, a

black curtain of soldiers, whence issued the flashes of pikes and muskets.

"There are the Walloons; beyond, the Bavarian companies," continued the count. "Oh, John of Werth laid all his plans well. Do you desire a battle in which all four of you may perish?"

"'Tis nothing to us, but to them!" said Armand-Louis.

"I would not have waited for your request," said the count, closing the window, "if it had been possible for me to grant it. But where Tilly commands, where John of Werth sleeps, a tiger and a wolf, gentlemen, we must hope in God. To-day is theirs; to-morrow, perhaps, may be ours!"

CHAPTER VI.

A MONK WITH AN APPETITE.

While the preceding events were taking place in one corner of Magdebourg a Capuchin monk was prowling about a house which the quartermasters of the army had marked as the headquarters of John of Werth. He was as long as a ladder, as thin as the paw of a hare, dry as a bit of twine and pale as a birch. His restless eyes lost sight of nothing about him; they were ever moving and flashed darkly with a certain something both savage and feline in their glance, that reminded one of the eyes of a wild beast. At times the monk forgot to answer the soldiers who, charged with booty, asked his benediction in passing; at others he bestowed a careless sign of the cross upon them with his right hand and a smile that bore more of covetousness than of humility. He never went far from the house, which was guarded by a Bavarian sentinel pacing up and down monotonously.

Night fell and quiet reigned. Some of the houses which were still blazing cast their red flames toward the sombre sky. Then in a neighboring street the sound of hurrying and heavy-booted feet was heard. Soon the shadow of the Capuchin was outlined against the wall of a building illuminated by flames. He was leaning forward to see the better.

"It is he!" the monk murmured. "Play fast and an hour may restore what chance lost to me."

At this moment John of Werth arrived in front of the house. The Capuchin accosted him and crossing his arms on his breast, bowed with a contrite air, saying:

"Will my lord John of Werth deign to lose five minutes of his precious time to listen to an humble servant of the Church?"

"Now?" asked the Bavarian.

"Now, if it pleases your lordship;" and he added in a

lower tone, "it concerns a person claimed by hell, whom my lord John of Werth honors with a particular hatred. I mean the Count of La Guerche."

John of Werth scrutinized the monk sharply and said:

"Father, would you be frightened by a venison patty, flanked with four bottles taken from the renegades of Magdebourg?"

"Though my habit has cancelled all commerce with the sensualities of this world, in the service of the cause which we both defend, you by your sword, I by my word, I will submit myself to the proof of the patty."

"And the temptation of four bottles?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Then follow me. We'll chat while supping."

The monk bowed to the ground and followed John of Werth into a lower hall which the Croats and the flames had respected. A stout oak table bore without bending the respectable burden of a patty modestly surrounded by a complete assortment of saucepans, black puddings and chitterlings, whence rose a steam of spices. Four long, narrow-necked bottles decorated each corner of the table.

"Ha, ha," said John of Werth, smiling, "Magdebourg has good stuff." Then pointing out a chair to the Capuchin, "Be seated, eat and drink."

"Ah," exclaimed the monk emotionally, as he raised his eyes toward heaven, "when one has labored all day in the vineyard of the Lord, 'tis sweet at eventide to discover that the modest efforts of an unworthy servant of the Church have not been disagreeable to Providence."

Having said this he rolled back the broad sleeves of his serge robe and attacked the patty vigorously, not neglecting the chitterlings, which he moistened with a brimming bumper of Rhine wine.

"My lord," he recommenced with a sigh, "the words of the Fathers of the Church are that we pardon sin; but when one has to do with a hardened and heretical sinner, the Holy Inquisition, which I reverence, hands the wretch who persists in error over to the secular authorities."

"The Holy Inquisition never errs," replied John of

Werth, striking an enormous breach in the side of the patty.

"Therefore it has seemed to me that neither pity nor mercy should be allowed to the cursed heretic who is known among his heretical brethren under the name of the Count of La Guerche."

"Neither pity nor mercy, quite right; but, unhappily, you must know, father, that the Count of La Guerche has, by some infernal art, interested a powerful dignitary in his lot, namely, the Grand-Marshal of the Empire, Count Pappenheim."

"I know it, my lord, I know it. And I see the hand of the Evil One in it, but the machinations of the Spirit of Darkness shall not prevail against the spiritual arms which it is my duty to employ, and if it please God we will conquer the obstinacy of this Huguenot."

"Your goblet."

The monk refilled his pewter goblet to the brim and swallowed the contents at a draught.

"The Count of La Guerche," he continued with a beatific air, "will surely leave here in a few days. Doubtless he will take the shortest road from Magdebourg to the camp of this son of Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar, whom the Swedes call Gustavus Adolphus. He will do this with the malicious aim of there securing aid."

"'Tis evident, father. You reason with a clearness of vision that charms me."

"Now, by giving the spiritual arms, of which I have just spoken to you, the assistance of the temporal, it would be easy to place the Count of La Guerche and his companion, the Marquis of Chaufontaine, beyond all power of injuring the well-beloved sons of our Holy Church."

"Beyond all power, you say?"

"The roads are full of ambushes. The wise man can never answer for the morrow."

The monk emptied a bottle and threw it adroitly out of the window.

"There's a monk with the hand of a reiter," thought John of Werth.

"Follow my argument closely," pursued the monk,

whose brain found greater brilliance at the bottom of each bottle he emptied. "These miscreants, whose names my lips cannot utter without the sensation of a red-hot iron, leave Magdebourg a fine morning, their souls full of black schemes. They think over the perpetration of them while on their way. But God, who does not permit the wicked to triumph, causes them on a certain evening to enter an inn whose proprietor is a holy man devoted to the eternal interests of religion. One may excite his piety by a gift and he will open the door of his house to the secular arm."

"Without compromising the name or reputation of anybody?"

"Does my lord take this venerable robe for the band of an infant? No, no; this arm has often put in practice the motto of a philosopher whose name escapes me, which is, 'dispatch and discretion.'"

"It is a virtuous and prudent arm."

The Capuchin bowed and filled his plate of the patty, which was fast disappearing.

"Moreover, I fancy," he went on, "that your lordship has, like myself, a horror of useless violence and of the spilling of blood. What we desire is not so much the death of the sinner, but his conversion."

"To be sure."

"Then the thrust of a poniard, which sends life into death, does not allow souls the time to repent and shrive themselves by abundant alms-giving. The spectacle of the miseries and sufferings to which they are to be condemned must move these souls to penance. Thus, if your Huguenot dies, Mademoiselle de Souvigny perseveres in her error. Where's your gain? The pleasure of triumph is unquestionably something, but not everything. The Count of La Guerche, on the contrary, is buried in some deep hole and begs the obstinate person to respond to the prayers of your lordship in order to obtain the deliverance of his miserable body, which suffers daily tortures. That would be beautiful! And to attain this end, our humble efforts must strive unceasingly."

John of Werth contemplated the monk with admiration. It seemed to him that this man, whose name he

did not know, outstripped the unfortunate Frantz Kreuss by a hundred yards.

"You know an inn then," he added, "which will extend hospitality to you at the price of a pious offering?"

"I do."

"And your arm will surprise the Count of La Guerche there and lead him to a spot where he will have leisure for long meditation?"

"With your permission both the Count of La Guerche and the Marquis of Chaufontaine."

"You have my permission with pleasure."

"You are a good man," replied the monk.

Then in a soft voice John of Werth called a lackey and ordered him to fetch four more bottles together with some ham.

"I cannot admire enough the excellence of your stomach and the vigor of your appetite," the baron commented with a smile.

"They are the privileges of a pure conscience," answered the Capuchin.

"Now, tell me, father, does your holiness undertake this mission of confidence for the love of your neighbor only?"

"Alas, no."

"Ah!"

"Times are so hard that I must solicit a recompense less heavenly for my services."

"I understand, father; and I think we can unite our efforts for the common good."

"That is my most ardent desire. I have not always been a lowly servant of the Church, my lord. In other days I wore a sword. If humility did not forbid it; I should add, that I handled it not ill."

"I suspected it when you showed me your arm a while ago."

"Unhappily the devil fanned my spirit to anger. One night we were playing dice with the equerry of his Eminence, the Duke of Friedland. I lost; and I killed the equerry with a stab of my dirk."

"Merely a move of passion, father."

"I asked pardon for it from saints and men. Now I

must obtain the forgiveness of his eminence the Duke of Friedland."

"I'll see to that."

"Later, while traveling in the Palatinate, I met the treasurer of His Eminence the Archbishop of Mayence. We dined under an arbor together. On the morrow neither the treasurer nor the treasure could be found. Certain evil persons stirred the rumor that I had something to do with this singular event. It is to be desired that His Eminence show his forgetfulness of the injury by ordering all investigation to be stopped and the proceedings to be closed."

"I will write to the Archbishop of Mayence."

"Later still in Bavaria in a castle where a marriage was being celebrated, a band of students and gypsies abducted the bride in her wedding dress and jewels. An unhappy chance had brought me to this company of vagrants the preceding day. They had been pleased to invest me with the title of captain. The bride returned to the castle eight days later and entered a convent. Alas, no trace of the jewels was ever discovered."

"Such things are easily lost."

"Calumny dared accuse me. It would be opportune, my lord, to engage the commander of the castle, a castle of the Holy Empire, to think no more of this affair which recalls to him such melancholy memories."

"I'll say a word to my master, the Elector Maximilian, and I believe he will accede to my request."

"There are certain other trifling peccadilloes under which my conscience has not slept. One among them caused a sentence of death to be pronounced by the ecclesiastical tribunal of Treves. But thanks to the intervention of my holy patron, I've killed so many Huguenots since then, that I am sure the tribunal would consent to remit my sentence did some charitable and powerful soul plead my cause."

"I shall be that soul, if you wish."

"Now, my lord, I have to present to you a last humble prayer. I should have none to address to heaven, if some one of your name and credit attached me to his person. The cloak befits my build better than the habit,

not that I disdain this pious dress, but each of us has his instincts and mine incline me toward the military attire. Yet I should always be able, when occasion required, to bend my head under a cowl."

"Zounds! Father, for the past hour I've been thinking that you alone could replace an honest servant whom I've lost, good Frantz. He was a clever man and one unequalled for enterprises of hazard. Avaricious, if you will, but not scrupulous. I weep for him every day. You are of his race and blood, with something more that attracts me."

"You flatter me."

"Not in the least. I speak of things as they are. You have, perhaps, a brain even more inventive, more fertile of resource, more prompt and energetic."

"Then, you agree?"

"Without the slightest hesitation."

"And I am yours?"

"From this evening."

"My lord," cried the monk, as he sent the four empty bottles flying through the window, "as true as this brittle glass breaks as it falls, shall I pitch at your feet, bound and gagged, these two cursed Frenchmen, called La Guerche and Chaufontaine. One is yours, my lord, the other is mine!"

"Ah, thou hatest them also?"

"Look at this scar on my breast. The poniard of one of them caused it. Though it were effaced I should never forget the man who struck the blow."

"Thy name, soldier?"

"Matheus Orlscoff."

"To work, then, Matheus, and if thou dost succeed, in all Germany there will not be a richer or more fortunate captain than thou!"

CHAPTER VII.

A MONK-RIDDEN INN.

When both the conversation and dinner were finished a vague inquietude filled the mind of John of Werth. He feared that his new recruit would not be able to stand up after the frightful quantity of food and drink he had taken. What was his surprise when he saw the Capuchin leap to his feet with the agility of a cat after the last slice of ham had followed the last glass of wine into his stomach. Matheus Orlescopp looked no fatter than if he had dined on a crust of dry bread and a drop of water. Thin he was and thin he remained.

"Some money, now," he said in a sonorous voice.

"Take what you need," said John of Werth emptying his belt on the table.

"I'll take all," answered Matheus, turning the gold pieces into his pockets. "This will close the eyes and open the ears of Master Innocent."

"Ah, his name is Innocent, eh, your innkeeper?"

"Yes, and never was a name better bestowed. He never does anything save to render a service to his neighbor."

Matheus was going out of the door when John of Werth seized him by the arm, saying:

"What will answer for your good faith?"

"This," replied the Capuchin, placing his finger on the scar of Renaud's poniard, "and the confession I made you. Half of it would hang an honest man."

"Fly then!" cried the Bavarian.

An hour later a cavalier well mounted and followed by two valets at a respectful distance, rode forth from Magdebourg. It was Matheus Orlescopp, traveling as a gentleman.

Passing the house of Count Pappenheim, he noticed a

brilliant light at the upper story and heard a pure and melodious voice vibrating in the night air, chanting a psalm of David. This was not the first time that he had heard this glorious voice. It recalled to him the inn of The Cross of Malta in the town of Burgheim. The shadows of the two gallant cavaliers could be seen against the window.

"Sing," murmured Matheus, "we'll see whether you will always sing."

Then he was lost in the night.

Armand-Louis and Renaud could not tear themselves away from their sweethearts. To the bitter regret of leaving them was added the mortal anguish of leaving them in the hands of one who had been a rival and was still an enemy. Loyal as they judged him, they were still captives and with what hope of ever being liberated? Renaud tore at his mustache and angry exclamations escaped his lips. Armand-Louis walked up and down or stood still, mute and pale with despair, looking toward heaven.

"Beaten!" Renaud was repeating incessantly.

"And both prisoners!" said Armand-Louis.

At times the wildest plans occurred to them, from which they recoiled only because they feared to compromise their companions still more. Adrienne and Diana were confident in hope.

"What do you fear?" asked Adrienne in a firm voice. "You surely do not do me the injury of thinking that my heart can change? Has my life been free from perils thus far? Do you think I am too weak to support the rigors of this new trial? Believe me, my heart shall withstand all proof and remain worthy of the name I bear. We shall be separated for some days or months. What are they in comparison to the long years that we have been together? Raise your head high and expect all from the future. The God who rescued me from the hands of Madame Igomer, after having sent us together from Antwerp, will have pity on us. I have more confidence than you in His goodness. A day may come, perhaps, when the memory of Magdebourg shall be for you and me as the memory of those storms of which sailors speak

with smiles. May it be not far away! Give me your hand, Armand, and place your hope in Him, who never deceives."

Diana spoke in the same strain to Renaud, but with a shade of irony, which denoted the difference between her character and that of Adrienne.

"Are you no longer the man whom I knew?" she said, "the cavalier amorous of danger and quick to rush into adventures? Perchance your devotion to St. Estocade has declined. Do you believe that this blessed personage is no longer able to perform miracles? She has allowed you to keep your dirk and sword and has not, to my knowledge, caused the heroic Carquefou to disappear. Have you decided to stop killing people, or do you think that your character is not constant enough to support a few weeks' absence? Speak, Sir, speak, if I must abandon hope, that I may have the time to accustom myself to tears. To tell the truth, I did you the honor of judging that you had a more robust temperament. Do you wish to leave me, thinking that you are to be compared to a willow, which trembles at the slightest zephyr, or are you afraid of losing your memory while on your route as a child loses its top? Do you take me for a will o' the wisp, which morning causes to vanish, and have you no strength left to cry: 'Chaufontaine to the rescue?'"

Renaud swore that ten million years' absence from Diana could not shatter his constancy and that he still remained the most faithful servant of St. Estocade. Armand-Louis, on his side, thanked Adrienne on his knees for having restored his courage and hope. Thus, amid these alternatives of dejection and resignation the moment of farewell approached.

The army of Count Tilly, fattened by orgies and booty, was about to leave this heap of ruins, which had been Magdebourg. On the morrow it was to open the campaign against the army of Gustavus Adolphus.

Count Pappenheim himself made this news known to them. The hour of separation was drawing near. Armand-Louis and Renaud were prepared for it, but at his first words they thought their hearts must stop beating.

"Say farewell! Leave you! Is it possible?" cried Armand-Louis.

"Ah, Diana!" said poor Renaud, and his voice failed him.

Adrienne cut short this fatal hour by running into her oratory, whither she was followed by Diana.

She stood by the window, behind a thick curtain and looked down into the street. She had remained firm as long as it was necessary for her to encourage Armand-Louis. Then there was not a tear, but a steady tone, a confident smile, a face all aflame with love and faith. But when she saw them disappear behind a corner of the wall, a deadly pallor overspread her features and tears flooded her cheeks.

"Good God!" she cried, clasping her hands prayerfully, "have pity on me!"

Behind her, prostrate, lay the laughing Diana, sobbing her heart out.

Count Pappenheim wished to escort the two gentlemen in person at the head of a body of cuirassiers. Count Tilly had given his word, but he had more confidence in the swords and shields of his soldiers. For a while they galloped along the road in a northerly direction, the grand-marshal in advance with the French gentlemen, and behind them the squadron. At two hours' distance from Magdebourg Count Pappenheim reined up his horse and said:

"Farewell now. You are free and the country lies open before you."

For some time Armand-Louis and Renaud rode in silence. They held in their horses, as though counting the paces that separated them from the prisoners. In the distance huge clouds of dust veiled the route of the imperial army. An opaque dome of smoke lay above Magdebourg. Everywhere they found trees uprooted or calcined, huts in ashes, sacked hamlets and fields of grain trampled under foot. But this mourning of nature did not equal the mourning of their souls.

Renaud was the first to spur his horse.

"Let's gallop now," he cried, "the faster we go, the sooner shall we return."

Armand-Louis bent down over his horse's neck, and followed by Magnus and Carquefou, the two friends speeded toward that point of the horizon where they hoped to find Gustavus Adolphus and the Swedes.

"Ah," said Armand-Louis, between his teeth, "if they need a guide to lead them to Vienna I am he."

One evening after a long run, which had fatigued only their horses, they came in sight of an inn, situated below a field of starved buckwheat on the edge of the woods. A few bundles of fresh-cut fodder embalmed the air. The horses shook their heads and whinnied.

"Poor beasts, they smell their suppers," said Carquefou, who had great compassion for sufferings of the stomach.

The horses stopped of their own accord before the inn. It was a vast building, whose black walls still bore traces of the fire which had devoured the castle of which it had formerly been a part. Here and there bits of ruins could be seen, and amid the remains grew fruit trees and vegetables. There was no sign on the door of the inn, but some dried branches of pine. An arbor stretched out on one side of the building, beneath which a monk was reading his breviary, in company of two lay brothers, who were mumbling prayers on their beads. The host ran out and seized the bridle of Armand-Louis.

He was a little man, with the face of a cat, his hair brushed straight back and hands crook shaped, like the claws of a vulture.

"Your horses are foundering," said he, casting a knowing glance upon them; "if your lordships have need of fresh and sturdy steeds, they can be found here."

"Ah, you're a bit of a horsedealer, are you?" said Renaud, dismounting.

"I find many horses running wild," said the innkeeper; "it wounds my heart to see them. I gather them in for the service of the honest people who frequent my house."

Carquefou, who had already paid a visit to the office and the kitchen, appeared at the threshold, and said:

"I never saw an inn so full of monks. I counted three round a pot which disseminates an amiable odor of bacon and cabbage; two in the garden; two others in medita-

tion before the store-room, not to mention the four who are now praying in the arbor."

"They are Capuchin fathers who are on a pilgrimage to Cologne. They come from the interior of Pomerania," said the innkeeper. "Their stay will certainly bring the blessings of our Lord down upon my poor house."

"Holla, Master Innocent!" cried he of the monks, who appeared to be the superior, "get my supper ready. A few lentils boiled in water and a handful of nuts."

"Humph," muttered Carquefou, "there's a specimen to disgust one of life."

"I desire neither wine nor beer," added the monk; "the water which flows in the bottom of the garden will suffice to quench my thirst."

Then the monk, whose cowl was drawn down over his eyes, crossed his hands over his breast and passed into the garden, followed by the two lay brothers.

Master Innocent hurried to the kitchen, and returned thence a moment later with a plate of lentils smoking sadly and a plate in the centre of which rolled a few nuts. It took him a quarter of an hour to serve this meagre repast, and as Carquefou, whose hunger sharpened his temper, remarked the fact to him, he replied:

"Ah, sir, the saintly man is nourished with the bread of the divine word."

Soon afterward the host showed Carquefou that he had something besides lentils and nuts in his house. At the sight of the good cheer which filled the place with the most delicate aroma, the honest servant sighed:

"Ah, if we were not sad, what appetites we should have!"

Armand-Louis and Renaud hastily swallowed a few mouthfuls, without exchanging more than ten words, and they related to the deliverance of their sweethearts. This was their sole thought and care.

"Let the horses be ready at dawn to-morrow," ordered Armand-Louis.

The host took a torch and conducted the young gentlemen to their rooms. One faced the garden, the other the road, at either extremity of a long corridor.

"I should have prepared to put you in the same part

of the house," said he, "but the holy Capuchin fathers occupy all the rooms with two beds, as well as those which separate you. But I have taken care that your lordships shall want for nothing. You see the sheets are spotless."

"That is well," said Renaud, "one night is short." Then he bade his friend to rest and pleasant dreams.

The host shivered when he saw him place his naked sword beside the bed within arm's reach, and then withdrew slowly.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HOSTELRY OF MASTER INNOCENT.

As Master Innocent passed along the corridor, a door was suddenly opened ajar, revealing the cowl of a monk. "The birds are caged," said Master Innocent in a low voice.

The cowl vanished.

At the foot of the stairs Master Innocent met Magnus and Carquefou.

"The rooms of your lordships are on the very top floor. I am sorry to have to put you under the rafters——"

"Never worry about that," interrupted Magnus. "Our lordships will sleep beside their horses."

In truth this had been their practice since their departure from Magdebourg. They had need to travel rapidly, and their salvation, as well as that of the prisoners behind them, depended upon their steeds. Magnus knew by experience that a horse neglected is often a horse stolen. Consequently, neither he nor Carquefou ever left the stable. They slept and watched by turns.

"What, sleep on bundles of straw when you may taste repose in beds of down!" exclaimed Master Innocent.

Then he endeavored to make Magnus understand what an unhealthy place the stable was, full of draughts and spiders, in fine a pesthole for aches and rheumatism.

"The windows are broken and the doors won't close," he added finally.

"That's the very reason," returned Magnus. "I don't wish my horses to take cold."

Master Innocent insisted no more. The face of Magnus indicated to him that he was one of those stubborn men, who stick to their ideas like an oak to its roots.

"The devil!" murmured the innkeeper as he went off. "'Tis lucky their masters have not the same opinion in regard to the horses."

At about midnight the last candle in the kitchen was extinguished. The universal silence was interrupted only by the snorting of the horses or their chewing of the fodder provided for them.

At this moment a door in the corridor was softly opened and a monk issued from his room noiselessly. His half-opened habit revealed a cloak of skin, bound by a belt on which shone the iron hilt of a heavy sword. Almost instantly Master Innocent appeared at the head of the stairs, holding a dark lantern.

The monk proceeded toward the room of Armand-Louis, the innkeeper toward that of Renaud. Each leaned his ear to the keyhole. A deep, regular breathing in each room informed them that the two cavaliers were sleeping.

The monk flung back his cowl and dropped his habit, disclosing the sinister form and features of Mattheus Orscopp.

"Now to work," he whispered; then, preceded by Master Innocent, who had rejoined him, he buried himself in a dark passage, whose door was cleverly secreted in a corner of the hall.

Meanwhile the two Frenchmen slept, all dressed on top of their beds.

A few moments afterward a panel of the woodwork which surrounded the room of Armand-Louis, glided silently into an invisible groove. It left only a slit in the wall, through which it would have been difficult to thrust a sword blade. Then the slit broadened wonderfully, and in the deep, black opening the silhouette of two men appeared. One was Mattheus Orscopp, the other Master Innocent. They held their breath. In their hands were narrow but solid strips of leather.

They stepped upon the floor without more noise than a cat makes crawling cautiously along the top of a wall. Behind them, like shadows, two monks followed them into the room of the Huguenot.

The latter's spirit was now in the land of dreams. He fancied that the door of a palace had been opened, revealing Adrienne to him in a garden all brilliantly lighted. She was extending her hands to him, which were

laden with chains. He advanced a step toward her, but a wall of crystal suddenly rose up between them. Hideous dwarfs and horrible grinning giants seized Adrienne and rushed off with her. Armand-Louis stretched forth his arms to deliver her, but on all sides he met the wall of crystal, harder than adamant. He struggled in mortal anguish; he tried to cry out, but his gagged throat let no sound escape; his limbs stiffened under the tension of his muscles and he sat up by a violent effort. Of a sudden he opened his eyes. Four horrible faces were looking into his; his feet were bound with leather thongs; others were rolled about his wrists, and before a single cry could burst from his lips a violent hand was laid upon his throat and throttled him.

All this had happened within two minutes after the panel had been slid open. Armand-Louis lay like a corpse about to be nailed in a coffin, before Mattheus Orlescopp.

"Do you recognize me?" asked the false monk as two of his accomplices laid the Huguenot across their robust shoulders. "It's my turn now."

The two men and their living burden vanished through the wall and Mattheus Orlescopp turned toward Master Innocent, who was trembling.

"Let's to the other, now," he said.

Soon afterward the same scene took place in the room of Renaud de Chaufontaine. A similar panel glided into its groove, the same men with like thongs leaned over the bed of Renaud. The same un pitying hand seized him by the throat, while indestructible knots were being fastened about his arms and legs; and he was carried from his room in the same manner as Armand-Louis.

"Above all let's make no noise," murmured Master Innocent, who shivered at the slightest sound. "There are two rascals below who will stomach no jests. 'Tis true there are ten of us, but they have a number of pistols in their belts."

"I know one of them," Mattheus answered. "His whole skin's not worth a florin. Nevertheless, let some one go and see what he and his comrade are doing.

A monk stole down to the stable and soon returned.

"One of the valets is snoring on the straw," he said. "The other is on the watch, his pistol in his hand, his sword on his knee. I did not dare let myself be seen."

"You did well," commented Master Innocent, "only let's make haste," and he shuddered more violently than before.

Traversing the passage, and descending the staircase, the two accomplices reached a rear yard, in the midst of which was a sedan hitched to two mules. They placed the two prisoners side by side in the sedan after Mattheus Orlescopp had tried the bonds to see that they were intact.

"Make a stir," he said, before drawing the curtains, "and at the first sign two balls will crack your skulls."

In a corner Master Innocent was counting the gold pieces which Mattheus Orlescopp had poured into his palm.

"They may be a little under weight," he said, "but friends do not quarrel over such trifles."

The sound of a trumpet in the night air startled him.

"Perhaps 'tis the Swedes," he exclaimed, turning pale.

"So much the worse for you, gentlemen," said Mattheus, frowning and taking his pistols.

He now enveloped himself in a serge habit and pulled the cowl over his head. With a haughty gesture he caused the gate of the yard to be opened, and, concealing his hands in the capacious sleeves of his robe and tightening his girdle, he went out.

Behind him followed a file of monks. The sedan was driven ahead. Dawn was peeping above the horizon, but a few stars still shone in the heavens. A troop of Saxon cavaliers was taking a spur-drink at the door. Master Innocent was passing from one to the other, bearing a broad-bottomed jug. He was trembling in spite of himself and dared not look toward the sedan or the stable.

Magnus was standing at the door of the latter building. Carquefou, seated on a stone, was spreading sausages systematically on a slice of bread.

"Confound that trumpet," he murmured, "I was sleeping so well."

Magnus took a step toward the sedan.

"One of our younger friars was seized with fever last night," explained Mattheus. "Pray for him, brother."

A kind of groan issued from the sedan, which was drowned in the sound of a psalm which the monks were chanting. The procession moved away.

Magnus looked toward the horizon, where he saw a narrow band of opalescent light.

"Ah," thought he, "in an hour we also will be off."

Then he returned to the stable, whither Carquefou followed him, yawning, and the latter stretched himself out on a bundle of straw.

"Confound that trumpet!" he repeated as he closed his eyes.

While the Saxon cavaliers were distributing hay and oats to their horses, Master Innocent quietly retired to a cellar, whence he rode out on a vigorous nag, first slowly, then at breakneck speed toward a fine wood about a half mile distant from the inn.

Here he found the whole band of Mattheus shedding their skins. Several of the monks had shouldered buff cloaks and were astride stout steeds, which had been waiting their arrival in the coppice. Others, among whom was Master Innocent, wore the costume of honest merchants, who go from fair to fair selling their wares. No sign of a habit or cowl was now to be seen. The sedan on the impulse of stalwart arms rolled to the bottom of a ravine, and the two prisoners, bound and garrotted on the crupper of horses, looked like two malefactors taken by a band of soldiers in the very act of robbery or assassination.

"Good luck!" cried Mattheus Orlescopp to Master Innocent, as he gave the signal for starting.

"God speed!" answered the tavern-keeper.

Then the two bands, separating, dashed forward each in its own direction.

CHAPTER IX.

A TERRIBLE AWAKENING.

Meanwhile day followed night; all about the countryside could be heard the usual noises of morning. The peasants drove their herds to pasture, looking about nervously, lest an enemy should spring up from some corner of the horizon. Wagons passed along the road. The angelus sounded from a neighboring monastery. The buzz of life was reawakened. Magnus had thrice examined the harness of the horses. The cloud of dust raised by the departing troop of Saxons could no longer be seen; and a profound silence reigned in the inn.

"This is the first time my master has been late," observed Magnus.

"Let him sleep," returned Carquefou. "Sleep is a blessing of God."

But he himself was tormented by his breakfast appetite, which he was not in the habit of resisting, and he left his straw bed to go to the kitchen.

He reappeared an instant later with a melancholy face.

"It's very strange," he said, "there are no victuals of any kind and no cook in there. I poked into every corner. Nothing and nobody. I think we've put up at an enchanted inn."

"Nobody!" cried Magnus.

"It's rather gloomy to set out with no breakfast."

But Magnus did not wait to hear his complaint. He went up the stairs of the inn four steps at a time, ran along the corridor and knocked at the door of Armand-Louis. There was no answer.

"'Tis Magnus, open the door," he roared in a voice of thunder.

Then he leaned his ear to the keyhole, but could hear no sound.

Carquefou, who had followed him, saw him turn pale. Magnus burst in the door and landed in the middle of the room, which was lighted by the sunlight entering through a half-opened shutter. The room was empty. But the panel lay open in the woodwork over the bed and the terrified glance of Magnus shot into the black pit.

"Through there!" he cried in a broken voice, and drawing his sword he plunged into the dark passage.

But Carquefou, instead of following him, leaped out of the room and across the corridor, dashing against the door with a shock that burst it open. He ran across the apartment to the alcove.

"My master also," he cried, "the wretches!"

Then as Magnus had done he dashed into the passage behind the alcove. A few steps lay before him. He descended them carefully and reached the end of the secret passage, which abutted on a door concealed in the corner of a ruined building. It opened on the rear of the inn, in a spot shaded by tall trees and planted with hedge wood. The footprints of many men could be seen on the moist ground.

Here Carquefou met Magnus, who was prowling like a wolf among the ruins. He was frightfully pale and muttered imprecations issued from his lips. Suddenly he perceived a cowl at his feet.

"Ah, it was the monks, and we heard nothing," he cried. "I am no longer Magnus."

For an instant his grief killed his indefatigable energy. The old reiter sank upon a stone and buried his face in his hands. "My poor master," he sobbed, "what have they done with you?"

Suddenly he rose, and, stretching out his hand to Carquefou, who was weeping also, he said:

"Brother, Mademoiselle de Souvigny and Mademoiselle de Pardaillan are in the hands of Count Pappenheim. The Count of La Guerche and Renaud de Chaufontaine have been stolen by John of Werth; it can be none other but him. We alone are left to save the four. But if thou art prepared to dare everything, as I am, let them be on their guard. They know not what two men can do."

"Count on me, Magnus. Command and I'll obey," Carquefou answered simply.

"Wilt thou swear with me that, at the peril of my life, and even if we must go to the end of the world, we'll save our masters, and that if either of us fall, the other will devote his bones and blood to this sacred enterprise?"

"I swear it!"

"Then let's to the hunt. We have wild beasts before us and we must kill them."

Carquefou was in the saddle as quickly as Magnus. He had neither hunger, thirst nor fear now. Their first proceeding, after having beaten about the neighborhood of the inn, was to follow the direction the troop of monks had taken. Thus they searched the pine wood and discovered the overturned sedan at the bottom of the ravine.

"They were in that, dost understand?" said Magnus, pointing it out to Carquefou.

There was no sign of blood around the sedan, therefore no idea of murder occurred to them. Besides, if the plan had been to kill their masters, it would not have been necessary to carry them off from the inn.

"Let's search farther," said Carquefou.

At the end of the glade, where the abductors had made a halt, the numerous hoofprints of the horses suddenly forked in two. Long traces stretched out before them inversely.

"Take the left," said Magnus, reining up his horse. "I'll take the right. The one who first reaches the edge of the forest will ride along beside till he meets the other. Open your eyes and ears. If thou find the band, break a branch and bend it in the direction you have taken. I shan't be long in rejoining thee. I'll do likewise."

Magnus and Carquefou dove into the sombre vaults of the forest. Two hours later they met on the edge of the pines, one from the East, the other from the West.

"Nothing," said Carquefou. "If there is one hoofprint in the sand, there are a hundred on the road."

"Thou hast followed a false trail," answered Magnus. "I've a good one."

"Thou didst see the monk?"

"The monk? Dost fancy he kept his habit? No, no. But a poor woman, picking deadwood along the way, told me that she saw two prisoners pass. They were bound to horses, in the centre of a body of armed men, and were riding rapidly."

"Though they ride faster than the wind, we will catch them," cried Carquefou.

The road they followed now led them into a large town, where twenty troops of cavalry had been seen riding during the day. As for prisoners, they had been counted by the dozen, both young and old. Some of these bands had stopped, others had kept on their way. Magnus and Carquefou ran from inn to inn untiringly, spying and questioning.

As yet they had struck no clue, when a stable boy spoke to them of a cavalier, who had been knocked down by his horse as he was about to set his foot in the stirrup. The man's leg was broken and he had been carried into a house.

"What's more strange," added the stable boy, "the poor devil, who swore like a pagan, wore an enormous rosary about his throat. It looked like a monk's beads."

A light broke in upon Magnus.

"Take us to this man," said he, exchanging a glance with Carquefou. "He's just the one we're looking for. Sweet heaven, but he'll be glad to see us!"

Carquefou said nothing and followed Magnus, who was led to the room of the wounded man by the stable boy.

"Holla, comrade," cried the latter, opening the door, "here are some friends to see you."

At the sight of Magnus and Carquefou, whom he recognized at first view in the dim light of the candle, the wounded man made a movement of terror, which corroborated the first suspicions of Magnus.

"Don't cry out, or I'll kill thee," said the veteran, unsheathing his long dirk.

"Have your talk," said Carquefou, closing the door carefully. "I'll protect you against interruption."

The wounded man, who was lying on a truckle bed, followed every movement of the two friends with a haggard eye.

"Wert thou not with the scoundrels who slept last night at the inn of Master Innocent?" asked Carquefou.

The wounded man replied with a groan.

"'Twas you who carried off our masters?" added Magnus.

"Our leader enrolled us for an expedition. An honest soldier has only his word."

"What's your leader's name?"

"Mattheus Orlescopp."

"Mattheus!" cried Carquefou with a bound. "Thou sayest Mattheus Orlescopp? God of heaven, if my hand does not cut his heart out promptly the count and the marquis are dead!"

CHAPTER X.

THE DUNGEONS OF RAVENNEST.

In the meantime Mattheus Orlescopp continued on his way. He was not better mounted than Magnus and Carquefou, but he had plenty of gold to barter for new horses when the old ones foundered. The band stopped only to take a meal in morsels, and then set out again. Two or three times they changed their course and their garments, the better to evade those who might be on their track. Ordinarily Armand-Louis and Renaud traveled on horse; they were described as state criminals, whom Count Tilly was sending to Munich. At times they made them sit in carriages, whose curtains were heremetically sealed. Then it was said that they were noble lords, who were ill and feared the open air. Mattheus never lost sight of Armand-Louis, but he addressed Renaud more readily.

"Life is all happiness and unhappiness," he said to him. "Brandenbourg and Saxony are not like the Netherlands. There 'twas Malines, here 'tis Magdebourg. One day you threw Mattheus Orlescopp to the ground, an ugly way of thanking him for the good supper he gave you. Another day 'tis Mattheus who is the stronger. But look whether I am not better than you. Instead of making you swallow a poniard, I provide you with horses, food and escort. Later I will give you the resting place to which you have a right."

When they were separated from the inn of Master Innocent by some dozens of miles and in a country where only detached bands of the imperial troops were to be seen, Mattheus, fully assured, caused the gags to be removed from his prisoners.

"Now let us chat," he said to Renaud. The latter, who had had time to chew his anger and felt in no mood

to converse with this scoundrel, glared at him from head to foot, and with a shrug said:

"My good fellow, you are very ugly. Have some polish given to your face to begin with, and then we'll see."

Some of the men of the escort burst out in laughter. Mattheus Orlescopp turned purple.

"Ah, you joke, do you?" he said. "We'll see what kind of a face yours will be in the place to which I am taking you."

"God grant it be not like yours," returned Renaud coldly.

From this moment this was Renaud's weapon. He executed infinite variations on the theme of the ugliness of Mattheus Orlescopp. He did not know whether Mattheus was uglier at night than in the morning; on foot or on horse; fasting or after supper; by the light of a candle, or in the glare of the sun. One thing only was possible, namely, that he might have an uglier shape than a face. This was a problem Renaud had not yet solved, and on its uncertainties his wit did not go dry.

"To be sure, your lordship has the nose of a hyena," said he, "the eyes of an owl and the snout of a goat; but in revenge your lordship has the body of an ape, the legs of a heron and the feet of a frog. 'Tis hard to say which is ugliest."

Mattheus was stupid enough to show that these pleasantries tortured him, and, seeing this, Renaud did not spare him. At times, even, he referred to Armand-Louis.

"Does it not surprise thee," he asked, "that a man with so long a nose should have so broad a mouth? He might have selected one or the other. Such little eyes and such enormous ears are too much for one visage. Tell me thy opinion of it: the magnificent lord who accompanies us desires to know it."

"And what cast of visage wouldst thou expect in a man who has a soul more grovelling than a worm, flatter than a leaf, and blacker than coal? 'Tis not a face, 'tis a sign-board."

"Prythee," replied Renaud, "we'll hang this signboard to the branch of an oak."

The raillery of the one, the arrogance of the other grew

to make a singular impression on the minds of the rascals in Oriscopp's train. They rejoiced over these qualities of boldness and good humor, which please even the most perverted natures. A kind of sympathy softened their stone hearts, which showed itself on several occasions. A stout lansquenet, whose life had been spent in wars and who had slept on all the highroads, did not fear to manifest his inward sentiments. The moment arrived when Mattheus understood, that if an effort should be made to deliver his captives, he could no longer rely on the aid of his companions. He reached a decision at once, and on a certain morning summoned the lansquenet.

"Friend Rudiger," he said to him, "I give you thirty rix-dollars. It is the salary I agreed to pay you. Count them and go to the devil!"

"Ah, 'tis a farewell!"

"And I fancy that we will have no further business together."

"You promised me a bounty, it seems to me."

"Have a care that I do not lay it on your back with a rope, and be thankful. Thy heart is much too tender not to be under a thin skin. This said, be off as fast as possible. Besides, console thyself; thou art not the only one whom I've brusquely bidden to leave me. My escort it shedding its skin."

Rudiger looked out the window and saw twenty new cavaliers in the midst of the men who were making their preparations to depart. The newcomers were part of a troop disbanded, after an unfortunate engagement with the Swedes.

"I enlisted them last night," said Mattheus. "There are Croatians and Bulgarians among them, who would hang a man as easily as they quaff a glass of wine."

The struggle was unequal.

"Till we meet again, Lord Mattheus," said Rudiger, taking the rix-dollars and biting his lips.

After the departure of Rudiger and the others he had sent away, Mattheus changed his course suddenly, despatched a messenger with the command to stop neither night nor day, made his cavaliers do double stages, and at the end of the week reached a castle, whose every door

was opened to him as soon as he had whispered a few words to the seneschal. He and his men entered. He visited its every nook and corner, then announced that it seemed to him to be a good place to camp.

Ravennest Castle was situated on the precipitous slope of a mountain, and it overlooked a gorge, through which a torrent rushed. Great pine woods buried it from sight. Its walls were solid, it had four towers, a moat and a drawbridge. It was a haunt whence a garrison could not be easily routed.

Renaud was placed in the Crow's tower; Armand-Louis in the Serpent's tower. The two were distinguished by their form. The one was round, the other square. Otherwise they had the same solidity, the same walls, the same furnishings, which consisted of a wretched truckle bed, two stools, an iron candlestick, a table of worm-eaten wood. Two dormer windows, adorned with thick bars, allowed daylight to pour in; the rain and the north wind entered as well.

"There's the room," said Mattheus; "'tis furnished."

"It is almost as pretty as you," answered Renaud.

"Rely on me that your food be all that can be desired," added Mattheus.

"Then it won't be like you, my amiable lord."

Mattheus tried to smile, flashed a sinister glance upon Renaud, and closed the door violently.

Nothing troubled the silence of the castle during the night. The wind blew in between the iron bars. The monotonous tread of the sentries, pacing around the towers, could be heard. Renaud sang to let his friend know the part of the building in which he was placed. Armand-Louis made a panther's leap and hung by his hands to the bars of the dormer. Before him, but separated by a curtain, was the tower whence proceeded the voice. An ocean of sombre verdure stretched itself out in the distance as far as the eye could reach.

A heavy sigh rose from the breast of Armand-Louis and he let himself fall back upon the floor.

"Saviour," he prayed, with his hands and eyes towards heaven, "my body and soul are yours."

The next morning the door was opened and John of Werth entered his cell.

"I suspected as much," said Armand-Louis. "From all I can see you dabble in many trades."

"Count," answered the Bavarian coldly, "one has not King Gustavus Adolphus always under his hand. We are not at Carlsrona now."

"I see that from the faces about me. But let's have done. What do you wish?"

"'Tis very simple. You are my prisoner, and the laws of war give me a right to exact a ransom. Give me your weight in gold coins and you are free."

"My weight? Where do you think I can find such a sum?"

"If I knew, I should certainly have been the first to seek it. Now there is another means of reaching an understanding, and an easier one."

"Ah!"

"Renounce, by a signed declaration, the hand of Mademoiselle de Souvigny; give her back her troth, and on the instant the doors of the castle will be opened to you."

"You dare to call that an easier means? This hand shall sooner be cold in death than sign such a declaration!"

"Nevertheless, reflect. King Gustavus Adolphus does not know where you are. His armies are far from here and nobody will come to aid you."

"If that is all you have to say to me, why this visit? You might have saved yourself the trouble, and me the disgust of it."

John of Werth arose and called. His features remained impassive. When a servant had placed the objects he desired on a table, he added:

"Here are pen, ink and paper. A few written words will set you free. Perhaps you may not always be as obstinate as you are now. The walls of this castle are good stone and will last longer than you. Farewell, Count."

Armand-Louis did not stir, and soon the sound of the baron's tread was lost in the stairway of the tower.

From the Serpent's tower the Bavarian went to the

Crow's tower. Here he found Renaud carving the profile of Mattheus on the wall with the teeth of a fork.

"Marquis," said John of Werth, entering, "I am sorry to disturb you, but continue if that amuses you."

Renaud turned halfway and without the least surprise, answered:

"Oh, there's no hurry. You know I have my model always before my eyes. 'Tis a remarkably ugly face and such a one as only your lordship could have chosen—"

"Lord Mattheus has my entire confidence."

"He deserves it."

"The fortunes of war have placed you in his hands."

"In his claws, Baron."

"He has the right to dispose of you."

"I fancy his lordship is using this right."

"Nevertheless, if you renounce the hand of Mademoiselle de Pardaillau, I might make use of my rights to get you out of here."

"God's day," cried Renaud, with a leap. "I thought you were minded of Mademoiselle de Souvigny!"

"Oh, I am always minded of her; but if I request this written and signed declaration from you, it is in view of a project to assure the happiness of Mademoiselle de Pardaillau."

"Baron, you are too good. I am so unhappy as to be possessed of such an extremely nervous disposition that I am moved to break something, a table, a stool or anything handy upon the back of whomsoever mentions the name of Mademoiselle de Pardaillan. You can see that such inclinations might be destructive to the rich furnishings of my apartment. Allow me to hope, therefore, that our interview is ended."

John of Werth rose, and pointing to the implements of writing, which a servant had just placed on the table, he said:

"Everything is here. Two lines upon the paper, and, in consideration of my friendship with him, Lord Mattheus will furnish you with a horse to leave the castle."

John of Werth descended the stairs; soon afterward could be heard the rattle of the chains letting fall the drawbridge. John of Werth was going away.

Another night fell, silent and black as the preceding. Armand-Louis hung by the bars of his window and saw a light burning in the tower occupied by Renaud. The light came and went; his companion was tracing a grotesque image of Mattheus on the wall of his cell with the smoke of the candle. This done, Renaud began to sing. He did not think that his day had been lost.

Armand-Louis' character did not afford him the same subjects for distraction. His thoughts had but one object, Mademoiselle de Souvigny, ever and always. Where was she now? Did Count Pappenheim forget the promises he had made in the midst of the flames and massacre of Magdebourg? Should he ever see Adrienne again, and would she still be loving and faithful? And brave Magnus, what had become of him? Had he not been killed? If living, would he struggle to save his master, as he had done before?

"Ah," thought the Huguenot, "when one has such hearts as those in keeping, hope is always with one."

Meanwhile days followed days. The same silence continued, interrupted by squalls of wind in the pines and the songs of Renaud. When Armand-Louis hung from the bars of his window, no rider could be seen in the black shade of the forest. The hours grew longer and more heavy. Each day at noon precisely, Mattheus Orscopp entered his cell, looked at the table, and seeing nothing, withdrew without a word.

Soon Armand-Louis began to notice that the meagre pittance which was served him for breakfast and dinner diminished insensibly. The crust of bread grew smaller, the plate contained less meat.

It was the regimen of a convalescent applied to a healthy man, the nourishment of a child given to a soldier.

He remarked this to Mattheus.

"Sometimes fever is caused in the garrison," replied the latter, smiling, "by too good cheer."

Thenceforward Armand-Louis disdained to make any complaints. On the morrow he had the dinner of an anchorite.

Several times when he awoke at dawn he had noticed

birds entering his cell through the two windows to seize the crumbs of bread on the floor. An idea crossed his brain, just when hunger began to gnaw at his entrails. By the aid of a cloth, which he adroitly threw over the little thieves, he succeeded each morning in capturing two or three of them. Then he hung from their throats or on their wings a piece of paper fastened by a thread. On the paper he wrote the words, "Ravennest Castle; Armand-Louis of La Guerche." This done he liberated his tiny captives, who flew away with a thousand cries.

"Who knows," thought Armand-Louis; "perhaps one of these scraps of paper will fall into the hands of a friend."

Each day the birds bore these uncertain messages to the four points of the horizon.

The observation which Armand-Louis had made upon the fare which was being served to him, Renaud had also made. It was the appearance of a breakfast, followed by the light shadow of a dinner. Renaud, whose appetite was superb, almost broke the back of the servant who laid the ironic meal on a corner of the table. On the following day his dinner was passed into him through a peep-hole, and was more slender still.

"And yet it is hard to imagine how it could be so," murmured Renaud, as he went to revenge himself by drawing a skeleton of Mattheus. For some time he resisted this slow torture, inflicted with the patience of a cat which torments a mouse. Then he felt his forces failing him. Horrible pains in his stomach, a ringing in his ears. He awaited the hour of his repast with a ferocious impatience, and he flung himself upon the wretched food which was served to him like a beast of prey upon the unclean flesh it discovers on the highway. This madened him, but he yielded to the cry of hunger. He recovered a little of his good humor only when he saw Mattheus. A flood of sarcasm would then issue from his lips, which were pallid with suffering.

By a refinement of cruelty, Mattheus, who until now had allowed Renaud to remain in his tower, had him transferred to a room in the centre of the building, whence he could see the garrison at table. The clatter

of the dishes, the tipping of glasses, reached the prisoner's ears like the refrain of a joyous song. The vapors of the meats mounted to his nostrils and redoubled the anguish of his stomach.

"Let's see," sneered Mattheus; "a prayer, sir, and I'll throw you a bone."

"'Tis wonderful, gracious lord," retorted Renaud, drawing himself up, "how ill good eating befits you. You are always more ugly, even when eating."

In this terrible struggle, the advantage was not always with Mattheus. He was laughed at. More than one soldier glanced from a corner of his eye, and the phenomenon which had occurred on the way to Ravennest was again taking place. Some of the less hardened guards made secret vows to deliver a prisoner who supported his miserable fortune so gallantly. Mattheus perceived these feelings, and his fury consequently increased.

Each evening a doctor entered Renaud's room and felt his pulse. Then wagging his head, he would say:

"Humph, the pulse is violent, hard, impetuous. The regimen is too succulent. A little dieting will do you great good."

Renaud had an infernal desire to bite this doctor. He contented himself with asking him quite seriously whether he was the son of Mattheus, his father, his grand-nephew, or his grandfather. He told him that their noses were cousins-german.

One morning Mattheus appeared in the room of Renaud. The floor was covered with scraps of paper of all sizes on each of which was drawn the hideous portrait of the master of Ravennest.

"Be prudent, sweet lord," cried Renaud; "if you walk on those dear pictures you would be putting the hoof of a goat on the snout of a wolf. What a pity!"

"Marquis," said Mattheus, bowing, "Baron John of Werth is getting tired of sheltering you so sumptuously. The place and table of a prince. It is too much. If it does not please you to sign this renunciation of good will, he will be constrained to use means to make you, which are repugnant to my gentleness."

"Have a care. If your tenderness overcomes you,

you'll make a worse than ordinary grimace. That would be frightful."

Mattheus made a sign. Two valets seized Renaud by the arms, sat him upon a stool and passed a rope around his wrists. The rope was held fast by a stick.

"Will you sign?" asked Mattheus.

"Ha, ha," cried Renaud, "I believe, God forgive me for so thinking, but I believe that the left side of your pretty face is more abortive than the right. 'Tis a question."

"Turn!" cried Mattheus.

The two servants turned the stick about which the rope was tied. Renaud paled. The rope was straining.

"Will you sign?" repeated Mattheus.

"Well," added Renaud, "I believe the front of his face is uglier than either side of it. See if it is not, fellows."

The servants smiled.

"Turn again," roared Mattheus, pale with rage. The stick was turned, and the rope entered into the flesh of Renaud. He let forth a cry and shut his eyes. His face was like death. The doctor, who had glided into the room, bathed the sweaty brow of the sufferer with a cloth soaked in vinegar. Renaud opened his eyes.

"Heavens!" he said. "Two masks!"

"Turn, turn," yelled Mattheus.

The stick traced a semi-circle. The bones cracked. Renaud's head fell upon his breast. The physician placed his fingers upon an artery.

"Another turn," he said, "and our prisoner will suffer no more. This is not what you desire, I think."

"Certainly not," answered Mattheus. Even before they had received the signal the two servants had unknotted the bloody rope. Renaud breathed feebly. The physician pressed the cloth of vinegar upon his temples and upon his nose. Renaud reopened his eyes.

"Well, what have you to say?" asked Mattheus.

"More and more ugly, always more ugly," murmured Renaud, and then swooned.

Mattheus seized a poniard which he wore at his belt, and arose. The physician seized his arm, saying:

"Do not kill him; you will regret it."

"You are right," returned Mattheus, shoving back the weapon in its sheath. "'Twere madness to yield to the first impulse. Take the prisoner to the green room. We'll see to-morrow whether he is in condition to see me again."

The green room was a dungeon, built under the foundations of the castle, out of a rock, which oozed a humid moss of green scum and slime. It was reached by a low door of massive iron. In one corner were a few wisps of straw, on which they laid Renaud, who was almost lifeless. They would have thought him dead were it not for the irregular beating of his pulse. The physician hung a lantern on the wall, and under it laid a jug of water and a bit of black bread.

"Let us be human," he said.

On the day Renaud underwent this terrible cruelty, all Armand-Louis found on his table was a crust of bread, harder than a shell, and a pot half filled of brackish water. It was one of the principles of Mattheus to entertain no unjust preferences. With the nourishment of his two boarders rendered alike, for so he sometimes called the Frenchmen, Mattheus believed it honest to also establish an equilibrium in their lodgings. Therefore Armand-Louis was conducted to the Red Room. This was a hollow cavern in Ravennest Castle, built under the Crow's tower out of a piece of red granite. It had likewise a wisp of straw in one corner and along the walls were certain hooks of sinister aspect. A lantern hung from one of the hooks, and under it lay a jug of water and a quarter of black bread.

One of the servants who accompanied Mattheus on this subterranean visit threw a coil of rope and some iron balls armed with a ring into a corner.

"Count," said the Governor of the castle, "we shall talk to-morrow."

In all Germany there was not a happier man than Mattheus Orlescopp at this moment. He had everything in profusion, good table and rich cellars, a warm bed and fresh beer, a tribe of willing servants, fat game in the neighboring forest, gold in his pockets, gibbets on his

towers, and the protection of a mighty lord who had need of him.

To crown this fortunate existence, he had the delicious pleasure of tormenting slowly and voluptuously two brave gentlemen, whom he hated from the depths of his black soul..

Assuredly he would not exchange the joys of this life for any other, no matter how brilliant. He compared them with the pleasures of the cheery sojourn he had spent in the vicinity of Malines, when, in company with the worthy Don Gaspard d'Albacete y Buitrago, he gusted the most delicate wines of Spain from so generous a hand. Now what a change! Then he acted on another's account, and under the orders of a leader, while at present his sole guide and counsellor was his caprice!

CHAPTER XI.

THE KINDNESS OF FATE.

Such was not the state of mind of Magnus and Carquefou, whom we saw last on the highway after their meeting with the soldier whose leg had been broken.

At the gates of the next city, where they arrived at night after a forced march, they learned that neither a cavalry troop nor carriages, nor prisoners had been seen.

"It is now four days," replied a citizen to their enquiry, "since anybody passed here. There is a Swedish regiment two leagues distant toward the north, a Croatian regiment at half a league toward the south, and, therefore, no one dares to venture on the roads."

"Did the rascal deceive us?" said Carquefou, minded of the wounded man.

"No; he was too frightened," returned Magnus. "The scoundrel whom we are hunting had changed his course."

They returned sorrowfully on their tracks. All traces were disappearing. They rode at hazard in an unknown country, and by hostile ways, where a thousand dangers might arise at any moment. What a number of marauders did they not meet? How many leaders in search of good arms and horses? But no consideration could prevent Magnus and Carquefou from persevering in their design, and if at times they thought of the perils with which their enterprise was rife, it was only in the fear lest an accident should unfit them to devote all their life and effort to accomplishing it.

They explored each town, each village, each hamlet. There was no more trace of the passage of Mattheus than of the flight of an eel through the reeds of a pond. This new discomfiture, far from weakening the resolution of Magnus, only exasperated him. He could not pronounce the name of Mattheus Orlescopp without paling. Never had such a fierce hate gnawed at his heart.

One evening when they were hastily eating a bit of bread and some cold meat at the door of a tavern, Magnus remarked a soldier who was studying him attentively. The veteran reiter, who did but seek occasion to question people, went up to the soldier, who arose and said :

"By the way, were you not at the inn of a rascal called Master Innocent, and did you not sup there with two gentlemen last month?"

"I was, 'tis true," cried Magnus. "Do you know them, or where they are?"

"I know them to be brave soldiers, and they interest me, who helped to garrot them, more than I can say."

"Ah, you were with Mattheus Orlescopp," said Magnus, whose hand instinctively sought the hilt of Baliverne.

"Yes, but let us not quarrel. I tell you these brave young men won me by their valiant humor. As for Mattheus, he's a bandit to whom I would not regret doing a dirty turn. There were ten counterfeits in the dollars he gave me."

"God's day! If you put me on his track, had I a thousand ducats they would be yours."

"Then, comrades, ride no more toward the west. Lord Mattheus has given up his first project of going to Munich. I think you'll find him by Holberg way, and if you will take me as your guide, I have an idea that we'll catch him. Rudiger has a good foot and a good eye."

"'Tis a bargain," said Magnus, "thou art ours and I am thine."

"And to both of us who make the pair," added Carquefou, giving a vigorous handshake to their auxiliary.

Rudiger, it will be recalled, was one of the cavaliers whom Mattheus expelled when he found that their sympathy for his prisoners was assuming too great proportions.

He took a cross-road, rode four or five leagues through a forest, forded a river and rediscovered the traces of Mattheus.

"Oh, if I had a thousand ducats!" exclaimed Magnus, almost embracing him in gratitude.

"Bah," returned Rudiger with a laugh, "it seems

original and amusing for me to do something for nothing. 'Tis a change."

They forged ahead. Confidence was restored in the hearts of the three companions. Even the horses rode with more elastic step, as though they knew what was passing in the minds of their masters. For six more leagues they continued on the right track. Then all trace of Mattheus and his company suddenly ceased. They seemed to have vanished like a procession of phantoms.

Magnus, Carquefou and Rudiger beat about the country separately on all sides. They examined every hut and inn, they allowed no traveller to pass unquestioned. Rudiger was of that race of hunters who rage on a trail. He returned at night to their rendezvous all fagged and discouraged.

"The damned fox," he said, "he has broken his trail."

A profound sadness overwhelmed Magnus. For the first time he felt his courage fail; nor was Carquefou more hopeful.

"Goodness of heaven," he murmured, "if Magnus weeps all is lost."

They were now in the common room of a sorry inn, where carters, hunters and travellers of all sorts were drinking. A band of gypsies stopped at the door and Rudiger went out with Carquefou to mingle with them and question them.

Magnus remained in a corner, his head resting in his hands, Baliverne laid across his knees. He fancied a black gulf was yawning before him.

A boy of about fifteen years came in, holding a bird in his hands.

"Isn't this wonderful?" he said to the hostess, who was spreading the cloth for the travellers. "Here's a bird with a bit of paper tied by a string about its throat. 'Tis the third I've caught in fifteen days. See, there are some words written on the paper!"

The child drew near the candle and endeavored to read them.

"It's impossible," he said. "The rain has washed out the ink. There's only one word I can make out, and it is always the same one."

He placed the paper on the stove to dry it. Some one opened the door and a gust of wind sent the paper flying to the feet of Magnus. He took it up mechanically and turned it about in his hands.

"See," added the child, "would you not say that there, quite at the bottom, are three words. It seems as if it were the name of a man. 'Tis easy to read the first one, which is 'Armand.' The others vanish."

Magnus leaped to his feet. He devoured the paper with his eyes and recognized the writing of his master.

"Armand—Armand-Louis of La Guerche, that's it," he said, weeping. Then he kissed the child, who looked at the tearful veteran in speechless astonishment.

When Rudiger and Carquefou re-entered they found Magnus on his knees, bareheaded and with hands joined. His features glowed.

"Oh, God, you are good," he prayed. "My God, I believe."

"What is this?" asked Rudiger.

"Now I've got him," cried Magnus, leaping towards Carquefou.

"Got whom?"

"Why, Mattheus, to be sure."

"Thou hast seen him?"

"No, but look. Pshaw. I tell you I have him."

Carquefou feared for the reason of Magnus. Suddenly the veteran stretched forth a crimped dirty piece of paper, saying:

"The child could not read it, but I have better eyes. Letter by letter I spelled it out. I knew well I would find him."

Carquefou distinguished vaguely the name of Armand-Louis; hope, an indefinable hope, sprang up within him. Magnus turned to their companion, who could understand nothing of this scene.

"Do you know Ravenest Castle in this part of the country?" Magnus asked.

"To be sure, 'tis a great devil of a stronghold in the depth of a wood."

"And on a mountain?"

"With three big towers."

"Which are called the Serpent's Tower, the Crow's Tower and the Great Tower?"

"Exactly."

Magnus embraced him brusquely and cried:

"Now, comrade, if thou hast really a heart in thy bosom, thou'lt be of great aid to us. I know the castle. In what fortress or citadel of Germany have I not placed my heel? This one is not the least formidable. I visited it in my youth. It is full of cells and dungeons, buried in the belly of the rock. The walls are high and stout, the moat deep; but M. de la Guerche and M. de Chaufontaine are there and we are three. Therefore, we'll save them."

Carquefou ran to the mistress of the house, took her about the waist and kissed her on both cheeks. Then he danced down the hall singing in a deafening voice:

"To the branch of an oak,
We'll hang the rogue;
If it does not hurt him,
It will do us some good."

He had improvised this couplet in honor of Mattheus and he sang it in a burst of gaiety.

That very evening Magnus, Carquefou and Rudiger slept in a cottage, situated in the vicinity of the mountain on which Ravennest Castle could be seen. The heart of Magnus tightened at the sight of these black walls, behind which Armand-Louis breathed; but Carquefou, who had regained his appetite, ordered the most juicy supper he had eaten since the fatal one taken at the hostelry of Master Innocent.

"There's nothing like a full stomach to open up one's ideas," he said.

Magnus disclosed his plans of campaign to his associates.

"Rudiger, who has been in the service of Mattheus," he said, "should procure information about the place. He must at any price get the countersign."

"I'll get it."

"I know a subterranean passage, thanks to which one may enter the castle, despite the bandits who guard it.

This passage opens into a valley. How many times have I not profited thereby to borrow from the lord of the castle, bottles of his best wine and quarters of venison, which I never returned."

"That's in the rules," interposed Rudiger.

"I will soon rediscover this entrance. What we need to know is, in what corner Mattheus has hidden the two gentlemen. Is it on high under the tiles or below in the cellars? This is what we must learn so as not to run in with the garrison."

"I'll find out," replied Rudiger.

"Thou speakest curt, friend, but thou speakest well."

"And what shall I be doing meanwhile?" asked Carquefon.

"Thou'lt prowl about everywhere, like a fox seeking a hen. Thou'lt contrive to open acquaintance with one of the inhabitants of the castle and thou'lt gain his confidence. Two sources of information are better than one. Above all, never lose sight of our horses. They will shortly have to bear double burden, I hope."

"Then they must have double rations now."

While Carquefon went to the stable, Rudiger resolutely took the road to the castle, and Magnus busied himself in the brushwood that covered the bosom of the valley.

After an hour's search he reached an enormous rock, whose base was lost in an inextricable thicket of briar. A great juniper was growing in a split in the rock.

"It should be here," thought Magnus.

He held back the bush which covered the ground and under a hollow, which one could never have dreamt of, if one did not know, he found a low opening veiled with long grass.

He stooped and disappeared herein. Thence he found himself in a narrow hall, which descended as it crept along the interior of the mountain. Magnus lighted a lantern with which he had provided himself and advanced slowly. After some hundred steps, he reached what seemed to be an impenetrable wall. He examined it carefully, shedding the light on the dank sides of the rock and at last found a nail, the head of which was sticking out of the wall. He took hold of it firmly and a

layer of the wall, shaking lightly, turned outward. A wave of air struck his face and in the glare of his lantern, which he held above his head, he beheld an immense dark cave, in which were buried the foundations of one of the towers. Tuns and small barrels were ranged along the wall. The first contained wine or beer, the others powder.

"This is the right place," murmured Magnus.

He retreated from the cave, shoved back the large stone into its socket, groped along the gloomy corridor and regained the secret entrance, where the blaze of the sun's light blinded him.

"If I had not been a marauder," he thought, "I should never have discovered that place."

Then he returned to the cottage, where Carquefou was lavishing fodder on the horses. He found Rudiger rubbing his hands joyously.

"Lord Mattheus has the charming gift of offending those who serve him," he said. "He maltreats and pays his people ill. That's too much. As a consequence one of the men gave me the countersign."

"Which is—"

"Agnus Dei and Wallenstein."

"The scoundrel! He mixes religion and politics. But patience, perhaps he will not indulge these fancies much longer."

"Furthermore, some of my former good comrades whom I met up there, received me well. I may come and go as I please."

"'Tis well at times to frequent bad company," Carquefou observed philosophically.

"But where are the prisoners kept?" asked Magnus.

"One of them was taken to-day to the dungeon of the Serpent's Tower, which is called the Red Room. He is tall, slender and fair."

"'Tis the Count of La Guerche."

"Maybe. The other, a dark complexioned man, has been transferred to a part of the castle which no one could tell me."

"'Sdeath," cried Carquefou, "here's a poniard which

will make Mattheus speak, though he were mute as a tomb and deaf as the wind."

"Thus, thou are not willing to wait?" said Magnus, touching Carquefou on the shoulder.

"Wait! They are living! Who knows whether an hour's respite may not allow this wretch time to conceive wicked thoughts. No, no; our masters are up there. To work, then!"

"To work, then!" echoed Magnus.

CHAPTER XII.

MATTHEUS DRINKS HIS OWN MEDICINE.

It was the same day on which Mattheus had questioned Renaud. The prisoners had been put into their new quarters, the one in the Green Room, the other in the Red Room. A stairway, carved in the rock, allowed communication between the former and the apartments occupied by Mattheus himself.

Mattheus had just supped delicately in the company of the physician attached to the castle. Enlivened by the conversation of this learned man and also by abundant libations he resolved to visit his victim.

"I am responsible for him," he said sweetly, "and I would not have his health endangered."

The physician staggered after Mattheus. The two found Renaud lying on the ground, munching his crust of bread.

At the sight of Mattheus Renaud winked and said:

"Ha, ha! There, a ray of light is making your nose enormously long. The polecats will be envious of you."

Meanwhile the doctor out of habit felt the prisoner's pulse.

"Don't you think that the dampness of the ground," said Mattheus, "may have an unhealthy effect on the nerves of the marquis?"

"To be sure," replied the doctor.

Mattheus made a sign. Two servants passed a rope under the armpits of Renaud, tied his hands behind his back and hoisted him a few feet from the ground.

"See whether the ring is solid," added Mattheus. "We must not expose the marquis to a fall that could injure him."

This was a new torture in addition to those Renaud had already undergone. The ropes were fastened in a knot.

"Good night, marquis," said Mattheus, saluting him ironically. "Till to-morrow."

"Till to-morrow," Renaud cried after him, "and see, my pretty lord, that you do not bite your ears while sleeping. Your mouth has a spite against them."

At the same hour and while Mattheus was returning to his apartment, Magnus was leading Carquefou and Rudiger to the great rock under which opened the subterranean passage.

He had brought with him cowls, ropes and gags. They all wore buff cloaks, adorned with steel blades, which rendered all arms hurtless. Carquefou and Magnus, muffled in false beards, were unrecognizable; each bore in addition to his sword, a dirk and a poniard. the one with a long blade, the other thin and short, and a pair of pistols well charged and primed.

At the end of the vaulted passage Magnus pressed the nail which stuck out of the wall. The stone turned and they entered the subway, in the centre of which stood the foot of the Serpent's Tower, a heavy, round mass.

"He is there," said Rudiger.

Magnus, without replying, walked around the foundation of the tower, examined the stones with his hand and his eyes and noticed one of a peculiar shape. He thrust his poniard in the interstice between this one and the next, thus making an invisible spring work. Carquefou and Rudiger, holding their breath, were watching his every movement with anxiety. A low door opened slowly and noiselessly before them. It was made of one block and was hung on iron hinges. Magnus passed through first and projected the flame of his lamp into the dungeon.

A livid shadow stirred in the obscure depths of the cavern.

"Oh God! My master!" cried Magnus, who had recognized Armand-Louis almost before seeing him.

With a trembling hand he cut the cords which bound him to his bed of straw.

"Mattheus did this," he said, his face scarlet with rage, "and he did it knowing that I lived."

"Ah, I had given up hope," said Armand-Louis, when he stood up free.

Magnus kissed his hand and wept to see him so pale and thin.

"Without doubt," said Carquefou, wiping his eyes, the robber has not treated Renaud de Chaufontaine any better."

"Is he also free?" asked Armand-Louis.

"Not yet."

"Let us seek him, then. I'll not leave this hole till we find him."

The Count of La Guerche hastily swallowed two or three gulps of a cordial which Carquefou had had the foresight to bring with him in a gourd. Then he left the tower.

"But you are staggering," cried Magnus.

"Ah, the thoughts of delivering my brother at arms will restore my strength," said Armand-Louis.

They covered him with a cowl, armed him with a poniard and a pair of pistols. Then all four ascended the stairs like snails, which led to the ground floor of the castle. They soon found themselves in a gallery dimly lighted by a lantern suspended from the ceiling. A man was on guard in one corner.

At the sight of the little troop he took a step forward.

Rudiger ran up to him and placing his finger on his lips he said:

"Agnus Dei!"

"And Wallenstein!" replied the sentinel.

Magnus nudged him and leaning to his ear added:

"Officers of the Imperial army sent by Count Tilly, Sir! I received them and I am taking them to Lord Mattheus. Something great is impending."

The sentinel smiled with a satisfied air and the troop passed on.

Another soldier stood at the very door of the apartment occupied by Mattheus.

"Agnus Dei!" he said, advancing toward Rudiger, his hand upon his pistol.

"And Wallenstein!" replied Rudiger; then lowering his voice: "Silence! John of Werth is here. He comes

from the camp. Whether Lord Mattheus be asleep or not he wishes to see him."

The man with the pistol opened the door.

In an instant Armand-Louis and his companions were in an immense room, one of whose corners was occupied by a great canopied bed. A two-branched candlebra burned on the table.

Magnus tore wide the curtains of the bed.

Mattheus Oriscopp opened his eyes and beheld the mouths of four pistols gaping at his breast. Over the eyes of the four men cowls were drawn.

"Not a word," said one of them. "A cry or a sigh and thou art dead!"

Mattheus remained still. The thought of a mutiny crossed his mind.

"Do you want gold? Speak!" he said.

"What hast thou done with Renaud?" asked Armand-Louis, throwing back his cowl.

An icy sweat overspread the visage of Mattheus; yet the cautious air of his foes convinced him that the castle was still his. If he could but gain some time perhaps he might have the last word in this argument.

"You demand the marquis?" he said. "Let them who liberated you find where he is."

He had raised his voice and made a movement to leap from the bed. The point of a sword touched his naked breast.

"Have a care," said Magnus. "We have small patience and thou art in our power."

Mattheus crossed his arms and hatred surmounting his courage, he said:

"Strike, then! If I die, the Marquis of Chaufontaine dies also."

The four companions consulted one another with a glance. Each minute dragged by like a century. They could hear the heavy and cadenced tread of the patrol passing in the gallery.

"Ah, my maskers," said Mattheus, smiling, "you think you can enter a lion's lair and go out of it alive."

"If he has any heart, we are lost," murmured Magnus.

"Then thou refusest?" asked Carquefou, shaking the governor of the castle in his bed.

"I do. One can die only once."

With one hand Carquefou seized the sword which Mattheus had laid on a chair beside his bed before going to sleep, with the other he began calmly to indent its blade with that of his poniard.

"To die is nothing," he said. "To suffer is everything. A ball or a sword-thrust in the heart—bah—'tis too gentle for thee. I'll make a saw and with my saw I'll cut thy wretched body in two."

Mattheus turned livid.

"Magnus, gag the man," said Carquefou, who after indenting the sword, tried its teeth on the table.

Armand-Louis approached Mattheus, who was pinned to the bed by the stout arm of Magnus.

"Listen," he said, "if thou wilt lead us to Renaud of Chaufontaine, thou'lt have life and liberty. I give thee my word."

"And if thou refuse," added Carquefou, "I swear by the thousand horns of the devil that the teeth of this sword will drink in the last drop of blood in thy veins."

"Now, thou hast a minute to decide," said Magnus.

Meanwhile Rudiger, pistol in hand, kept guard at the door.

Mattheus regarded in turn each of the actors in this scene. Each was merciless. Carquefou rested the notched sword blade on the damp thighs of Mattheus, whose every fibre quivered. Carquefou made a movement and the sharp teeth of the saw tore the skin.

"Oh," moaned Mattheus, his eyes starting from his sockets, "I yield. The passage is there; I'll guide you," and his teeth chattered as he spoke.

Carquefou raised the saw.

Mattheus, held at each arm by Magnus and Rudiger, went into a room and descended a stairway, at the foot of which they saw an iron door.

"He is in there," said Mattheus.

"Ah, bandit, under thy hand!" murmured Carquefou. "Give us the key!"

When the door was opened they saw Renaud. He was

hanging from a hook, fully three feet from the floor. His head had fallen on his chest and he seemed to be dead.

"Oh, thou miscreant!" cried Carquefou, who with a bound, caught the body of his master, cut the ropes, laid him on the ground and untied his bonds.

Renaud sighed. Carquefou forced the neck of his gourd between his master's lips. The prisoner drank deeply; then opened his eyes. At the sight of Armand-Louis he stood up and pointing to Mattheus, without waiting to understand the situation, he said:

"See, there's the ugliest man I know. 'Tis beyond all credence."

But Carquefou had already seized Mattheus, and before any of them could oppose him he had suspended him in the same place from which he had just taken his master.

"'Tis thy turn for the ring," he said, "and thank God that the Count of La Guerche has pledged his word to thee, or I swear my sword should have put thee into eternal sleep on that pack of straw."

"Listen," continued Renaud, "I know the ways of the house. To-morrow at noon they fetch thee a handful of lentils, swimming in a little water. The doctor, thy friend, will prove to thee that thou hast not slept ill and you can breakfast together. Now forget not this one thing, my dear lord. I have the sweet hope of meeting thee again. But on that day thou shalt be hanged so well and tastefully, not by the armpits but by the neck, that thy last grimace shall frighten the world."

Mattheus was hanging bound and gagged. Magnus closed the door and the men retired to the room they had just left. On their way, Carquefou, who had an eye for everything, rammed into his pockets a long, fat purse which he found on the table.

"'Tis an orphan," said he, "let's offer it an asylum."

Renaud cast a glance of question upon him.

"Marquis," he continued, "one must leave no munitions of war to the enemy. The rules of the commonest prudence command this."

While he was speaking he enveloped his master in a garment that Mattheus had worn.

"What a cruel fate," he commented, "to hide one's self in the skin of a wolf."

Renaud turned suddenly pale and staggered. At this instant a patrol passed in the gallery and some one knocked at the door.

"What is it?" asked Magnus in a muffled voice.

"The doctor wishes to ask your lordship whether it be not opportune to pay a visit to the prisoner," answered the man who had knocked. "He may die in the night and that would be a pity."

"The prisoner has a tough life," returned Carquefou, who was supporting Renaud. "I know him. To-morrow he'll be fresh and lively as an eel."

While these words were passing the five companions made ready their arms in utter silence.

The step of the patrol moved away in the distance and the voice was hushed.

"I thought the hour to conquer or die here had come," murmured Magnus, breathing again.

"Be of good heart now, marquis," said Carquefou, "if we do not wish to be caught in this hall like gudgeons in a net let's make haste to get out."

"I've suffered so much," said Renaud, making a desperate effort. "But, be assured, when the soul commands, the body must obey."

Then with a slow but firm tread he walked toward the door.

Magnus opened it resolutely; the sentinel who had not moved, stared at them.

"Not a word!" Magnus whispered in his ear.

Rudiger, who followed, half uncovered himself.

"John of Werth is here with Lord Mattheus," he added. "Tis business of the state. Say nothing to thy comrades of what thou hast seen."

The sentinel drew up respectfully against the wall and gave the military salute.

The troop attained the end of the gallery, descended the staircase and soon found itself in the subway of the castle. A draught of fresh air caressed their cheeks. The secret door in the foundation of the tower yawned before them. They passed through one after the other, Car-

quefou first, Magnus last. The stone block fell back in its mute frame and within a few moments the fugitives reached the entry of the long passage, which they had traversed two hours before. When they had brushed aside the shrubs and reeds which masked the narrow vault, they saw a myriad of stars shining in the heavens. Armand-Louis and Renaud fell upon their knees.

"Free!" they murmured in one voice.

Behind them, Magnus, Rudiger and Carquefou were embracing each other.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BATTLE.

Yet the merest accident might arouse the garrison. They had no time to lose if they would put a broad space between them and Ravennest Castle. The horses, tied in a lonely corner of the gorge, were ready for them. Rudiger charged himself to reconnoitre the road; Magnus and Carquefou took Armand-Louis and Renaud on their horses and set out on a gallop.

At the first halt, Carquefou rode into a neighboring village and returned with two fresh horses for his masters. On the saddle bows of each were pistols and a sword.

"I think there must have been a fight in the neighborhood," he said, "I got the beasts and the arms for twenty pistoles."

A few hours' sleep after some cold mutton and good old wine restored to Armand-Louis and Renaud a part of the forces they had lost. The latter unsheathed his sword and tried its mettle.

"Sharp, supple and easy to handle," he commented. "I fancy St. Estocade will soon afford me an opportunity to prove its temper."

One thing bothered Carquefou. He could not refrain from confiding it to Magnus.

"There were black passages in that hole," he said, "in which the devil himself never set foot: moving stones and secret doors no sorcerer could discover. By what chance didst thou learn of them?"

"Friend Carquefou, Magnus was young once, though a long time ago," answered the veteran. "At that time I was equerry to a baron who hunted on the domain of the castillon of Ravennest. When the latter was on the hunt or traveling, the baron paid visits to the castle. The

Lady of Ravennest had a fresh and pretty maid. Poor Catinka! What has become of her? Whither the baron went, thither went the equerry in his turn. Dost understand now?"

"I do."

They ran until evening without unbridling.

The action and fresh air invigorated from hour to hour the muscles of the gentlemen with the force and elasticity to which they had been so long accustomed.

When night began to fall they were at least fifteen leagues from Mattheus. The direction they followed led them near the provinces where the weight of Swedish arms was felt. They had now very little to fear from the master of Ravennest.

"Perhaps 'twere as well," suggested Armand-Louis, "to find out what has become of King Gustavus Adolphus."

On their way they had passed cottages in ruins, hamlets in ashes. Here and there harvests were trodden down by the march of cavalry, trees hewn to the ground, orchards destroyed, bits of land freshly turned, in ditches lay the half decomposed bodies of horses. It was clear that many troops of warriors had fought in this territory. They must take care not to fall into the hands of the Imperialists. The Croatian squadrons had at times a very expedite method of ridding themselves of their prisoners.

The peasants and innkeepers whom Carquefou and Magnus questioned told them that indeed many battles had been fought in the vicinity. Everywhere the Swedes had conquered, but real war had scarcely commenced. Since the sacking of Magdebourg the two belligerent armies had been manoeuvring to meet. Count Tilly was no less urgent to offer battle to the King of Sweden than Gustavus Adolphus was desirous to accept. Yet as their desires were the same, so was their prudence. Neither of the generals wished to leave anything to chance. The one had an old reputation to sustain and did not wish to expose an army, which till now had known naught but victories, to the shame of a defeat. The other, heralded by a fame already glorious, surrounded himself with precautions before measuring himself with the most experi-

enced commander in Europe. They both felt that perhaps on their first battle hinged the issue of the war and by a counter-stroke the fate of Germany. Meanwhile their flags approached each other day by day. The circle in which they moved grew narrower. Skirmishes became more frequent. Everything presaged an impending shock in some corner of the province.

"Let's not miss the ball!" said Renaud enthusiastically.

Thanks to the information they secured from the soldiers and deserters they met continually; they learned almost precisely toward what point they must ride to avoid the Imperialists and meet the Swedes. It was not an easy matter, in the midst of bands of Hungarians and Croats who were ravaging the land, and whose caprices, or the thought of a richer booty here or there, drove them like a blast of wind drives a cloud of locusts.

They heard no more of Mattheus Orlescopp, and Carquefou, enlivened by travel, repeated his famous song:

"To the limb of an oak,
We'll hang the rogue."

One morning the light breeze, which follows the birth of day, bore to their ears the echo of a formidable noise booming in the distance.

"Cannon!" said Renaud.

They all stopped. It was really cannon and they heard its incessant thundering from afar.

Carquefou pointed out great clouds of white smoke which veiled one side of the horizon.

"Over there," he said.

Magnus pressed his ear to the ground, which trembled.

"That's no skirmish," he said, "nor yet a combat. 'Tis a battle."

A gleam of joy flashed in the eyes of Armand-Louis and of Renaud. The latter was already fondling his sword, which he drew from its scabbard little by little.

"The road is free," said Magnus turning to Rudiger, "thou hast been brave and loyal. If thou come with us this hand which has clasped thine will never forsake thee. If thou goest elsewhere, good luck! But thou went with

the Imperialists and I warn thee that we cry, 'Long live Gustavus Adolphus!'"

"I am a Pole. Where there's fighting, I fight. Forward, I am yours," replied the reiter, who with a feverish hand gathered the reins of his horse.

The roar of the cannon continued.

"To the cannon!" cried Renaud.

The five cavaliers shot forward like a thunderbolt.

As they were turning the brow of a hill, over which they were galloping, such a magnificent spectacle struck their sight that of one accord they reined up their horses.

"By St. Estocade, my patroness," exclaimed Renaud, "but that is beautiful!"

In the plain at the foot of the hill the two armies were met. The regiments were clashing together. The artilleries were thundering. From the colors of the standards the spectators discovered that the Imperialists occupied the flank of the eminence and that the Swedes had taken the offensive. A man, wearing a doublet of green satin under a cuirass of steel, and bearing a scarlet plume on his brow, which was lashed by the wind, sat on his horse on the summit of a hillock. Groups of officers surrounded him.

"Count Tilly," said Magnus.

From time to time Count Tilly made a sign of his hand and an aide-de-camp would set out at breakneck speed. Then the commander would observe anew the waves of battle.

The Imperialists had the advantage of position; the Swedes and their Saxon allies the superiority of attack. The fire of the artillery, stationed at one side, did not balk them, and such was the fury of their onslaught that at each offensive return new regiments were obliged to descend the hill to meet them.

Yet one of their wings had just wavered. The confusion of the ranks was visible; the ground was heaped with corpses. Fugitives without number ran in rout, and in the distance a squadron was pillaging an encampment. Great joyous cries arose from the Imperialists.

"The Saxons are routed," said Magnus.

But in the thick of the battle a picked body had now

launched forward with such intrepidity, that overturning all in its path, it succeeded in climbing the first rows of the escarpment. The Imperial army retreated in disorder.

"The blue regiment! The yellow regiment! 'Tis the king!" roared Magnus.

Count Tilly made a sign. An officer set out on a gallop and flung himself ahead, straining every nerve of his horse. At the same moment a body of cavalry, which had been concealed behind a slope, came in view and descended to meet the Swedes. The sun shone on their shields, a clatter of steel accompanied their charge; men and horses passed like a torrent of fire.

"The cuirassiers of Pappenheim!" said Magnus.

A moment later Imperialists and Swedes were lost in clouds of smoke.

Not far from the stirless spectators of this bloody drama, the Austrian artillery rained a hail of shot on the decimated regiments of the king. Yet around this artillery neither reiters, lansquenets, cuirassiers, dragoons nor musketeers were now to be seen.

"Forward!" cried Armand-Louis, whose visage had suddenly become illuminated.

This cry awoke Renaud from his silence and his admiration.

"Yes, forward!" he repeated as he spurred his horse in pursuit of Armand-Louis, who was riding down the hill.

In their wake Magnus, Rudiger and Carquefou followed across the circle of fire where the cuirassiers of Pappenheim and the regiment of the king had just struck.

In the thickest of the strife they saw Gustavus Adolphus. A more terrible dash bore them close to him. Balls and bullets dug holes in the battalions. The confusion of men and horses was horrible. The cuirassiers of Pappenheim, like a wall of iron, barred the way of the Swedes, who were broken by their successive charges.

Before the reserves, called for by Gustavus Adolphus, could even arrive on the field of carnage, they were cut down by the torrent of projectiles which the Imperial batteries vomited forth incessantly.

The king, who redoubled his efforts and bore himself into the most perilous passes, felt that victory was escaping from him. Corpses heaped up about him. When he charged, the ranks opened as a wall falls before the battering ram. Once he had passed the ranks closed and the struggle remained violent and uncertain.

"Oh, the cursed cannon," cried the king. "If they do not stop they'll cost me honor and life."

Then he spurred his horse in the direction of the batteries. Suddenly Armand-Louis, covered with blood, appeared at his side.

"Sire," he said, "give me five hundred cavaliers and the cannons are ours."

The Duke of Lauenbourg, who was near Gustavus Adolphus, trembled.

"What madness!" he cried, "while we have still the chance, let us retreat. It's impossible to climb up there."

"Sire, five hundred men and I will answer for all," repeated Armand-Louis. "But the seconds are counted. Make haste."

Gustavus Adolphus called Arnold of Brahe, who had just plunged his sword into the throat of a cuirassier.

"Let the orders of the Count of La Guerche be obeyed as my own. Go!" said the king.

"Sire, I thank you. Hold the place only a quarter of an hour and you will have news of me," cried the Count of La Guerche, spurring his horse out of the confusion.

"Hold it!" said the king; "I'll die here before I retreat."

The Count of La Guerche had soon collected some hundreds of cavaliers, when one captain hesitated to follow him.

"By order of the king!" said Arnold and they ranged themselves behind him. The Huguenot squadron was battling terrifically not far from here.

"Zounds!" said Renaud, "there are our compatriots. I'll fetch them to thee!"

He shot out like an arrow and gained the Huguenots by rough riding over all in his course. The clamor which arose as they caught sight of him showed that the soldiers of La Rochelle recognized him.

"Here are our friends," said Renaud, reappearing at the head of the Huguenots.

When they saw Armand-Louis the dragoons let forth a thousand huzzas.

"To battle, gentlemen," said Armand-Louis, placing them in the first ranks.

He had now almost the number of men he desired. He skirted the lines of the Swedish army, then turned them and discovering a free issue, he pointed with his sword towards the Imperial artillery crowned with fire.

"Now to the batteries!" he thundered.

"To the batteries!" repeated Renaud and Magnus.

"If we ever return, 'twill be a miracle," murmured Carquefou, lowering his head and plunging forward.

The Huguenots and the Swedes came down upon the cannons with the velocity of an avalanche. Some infantry mixed up with artillerymen endeavored to oppose them, but they were sabred across the guns and every battery fell in an instant into the power of the assailants. Then a body of cavaliers, imitating the example of Armand-Louis and Arnold, alighted and turned the cannon on the Imperial army. In an instant Magnus, Carquefou, Rudiger and twenty others charged the pieces.

"Fire!" commanded Armand-Louis.

A roar of thunder answered him and forty balls bore death into the ranks of the Austrians. Some of the men fell lifeless around Count Tilly. He turned in amazement and looked behind him. At the sight of the Swedish uniform he paled and said:

"Ah, we are conquered!"

The king also had just recognized the colors of the La Guerche Dragoons planted on the batteries. Before him whole lines of cuirassiers fell like ripe corn before the scythe. His band, gathered at the sign of his sword, followed him for a supreme onslaught. The cavalry of Papenheim wavered.

But they had to do with two men who did not yield easily. They redoubled their efforts, and rallying the ruins of their scattered regiments, they strove to re-establish the battle. All that courage can dare, all that the most consummate experience can advise, they endeav-

ored to accomplish with an equal ardor and tenacity. But the breath of triumph influenced the Swedish army and urged it onward. A few squadrons gathered about Count Pappenheim, some regiments chained by discipline alone resisted them and still obeyed the voice of Count Tilly.

"Look at him!" exclaimed Renaud to Armand-Louis, pointing out the Grand Marshal of the Empire, who stood in his stirrups and felled to earth every soldier who approached him.

Neither Armand-Louis nor Renaud could help admiring this valiant warrior. He showed himself superior to ill fortune and knew at once how to command and how to strike.

"Ah, that he may not fall here, he whom they have so properly surnamed 'the Soldier,'" said Renaud. "And oh, that I might one day meet him face to face. See, he's a lion. None can down him, none can stop him."

"Well, then," cried Armand-Louis, "since Count Pappenheim cannot reach us, let us go to him."

"Let us fly!" yelled the Huguenots.

A flood of assailants had separated him from Count Tilly and, like a boar harassed by a pack of hounds, the Grand Marshal galloped into the neighboring wood, whither all that remained of his magnificent cavalry had disappeared before Renaud could come up with him.

The army of Count Tilly, this army which was called invincible, was at last overthrown, annihilated. He alone still stood his ground, hoping that some chance would render him victory which had so long been faithful to his colors. But the hour came at last when he was obliged to yield to the officers grouped about him. They had remained beside him despite the horror of the rout.

When the old commander decided to quit the field of battle, on which his military fortune had been shattered, night was falling and still it was not easy for him to escape from his conquerors.

Hunted unremittingly, wounded four times, weakened by loss of blood, it seemed as though Count Tilly could no longer evade the Swedes who were mad to capture him. His escort, diminished each minute by fire and sword, was reduced to a few men. Two leagues from the

field the pursuit still rolled on. An officer of the Finnish Guard, his sword aloft, approached the conquered commander and raised his hand to seize him by the belt.

Captain Jacobus, terrible and livid, his hands red with blood, his hat and cloak in tatters, more furious than frightened, was marching in the rear of the escort. With a blow of his pistol he broke the Finlander's skull and then helped the aged commander to mount the steed of the dead man.

"If Count Tilly fell, who would fight Gustavus Adolphus?" he said.

"I thank you," replied the man of Magdebourg.

Then digging the spurs into the Swedish horse, he gained the forest where Count Pappenheim was rallying the remains of his regiments.

For an instant Captain Jacobus paused to give his horse a chance to breathe. He glanced back toward the heights now crowned by the Swedish army.

"Thou dost triumph to-day, Gustavus Adolphus," he cried, "but patience. The war is not ended. We shall meet again."

A great shout struck upon his ears. It was the voice of Armand-Louis, who had caught sight of him and was now charging upon him, followed by Magnus.

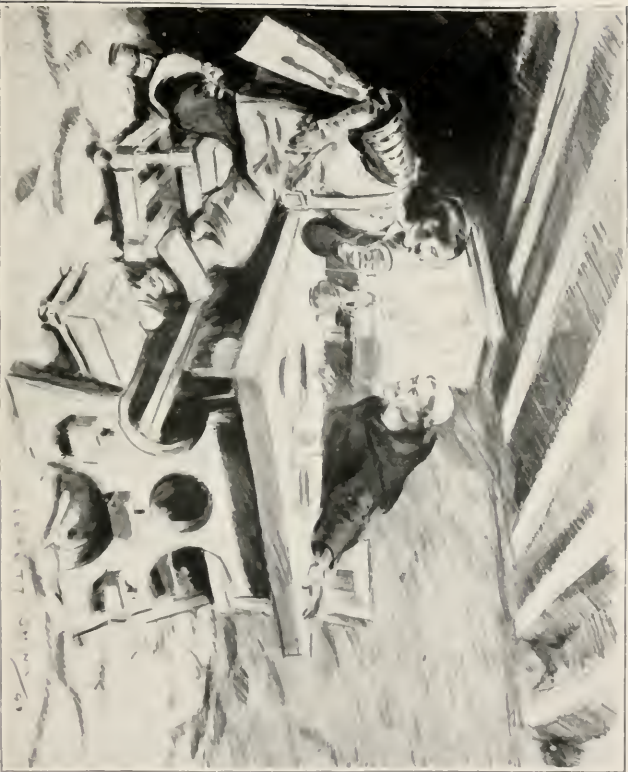
It will be remembered that Armand-Louis and Renaud had rushed upon Count Pappenheim; but in the confusion they became separated and each thrust his sword at hazard in the conflict, the one striving to reach Count Pappenheim, the other Count Tilly.

Armand-Louis had ridden across the plain in a lost quest, when he perceived Captain Jacobus. In a minute he was brandishing his sword and dashing toward him. But Captain Jacobus turned his horse and did not tarry. He had no intention of exposing his life while the King of Sweden lived. Provided with a fleetier mount he soon attained the edge of the wood and was lost therein.

Magnus seized the bridle of his master's horse, saying:

"Halt! The wood is full of ambushes."

"Ah," returned Armand-Louis, shuddering with rage,



"Unhappily the devil fanned my spirit to anger."—p. 52.

"that scoundrel will not always be so lucky as to have a forest before him."

As he rode back leisurely he heard cries of distress. He traced the sound and in the thick of a band of cavaliers, near a burning cottage, he saw a woman lying on the ground and a young girl who was struggling with her assailants.

"'Sdeath!" roared Armand-Louis, "there are wretches who will pay for Captain Jacobus."

He spurred his horse into a gallop.

"'Tis imprudent," cried Magnus, who followed him. "They are twelve, we are two, and now is the time that the best soldiers often become plunderers."

Magnus glanced over the plain and saw naught but horses running wild, corpses here and there and in the distance a veil of smoke.

"This is a nasty adventure," he said to himself as he galloped onward.

One of the cavaliers had seized the young girl by the arm. She clung to the body of the woman lying on the ground, whose head was cloven in twain with a sabre blow. The man tore her up and lifted her to his horse.

"Scoundrel!" yelled Armand-Louis, leaping forward and hitting the ravisher's hand with the flat of his sword, "be off!"

"Oh, save me," sobbed the girl running to the Huguenot. "They have killed my mother."

Her dishevelled hair fell down over her face. Blood flowed on her cheeks. Armand-Louis leaped before her and cried:

"Death to him who touches her!"

But the cavaliers had reckoned their number and one of them jeered:

"Kill a soldier for a gypsy! Death to the officer!"

The sound of his voice still vibrated in the air as Balverne sank into his throat.

"Be still, chatterer!" growled Magnus.

Then in a lower voice he added:

"A stupid business! They have still the advantage of number."

But the boldness of the two rescuers, the fiery attitude,

the swiftness of their blows, all had disconcerted the ravishers. They hesitated and consulted among themselves.

"Yet we can't leave here without some booty," said one of them.

"Here," pursued another, "give us the girl and go on your way."

"Come and take her!" roared Armand-Louis, and charging upon the soldier who had addressed him, he sent him in a heap to the earth with a sword thrust through his heart.

The freebooters let forth a cry of rage, and serrying their rank, they raised their sabres.

"This is going to be a mess," thought Magnus, "and all for a gypsy."

At this juncture Renaud and Carquefou, followed by five dragoons, appeared. They had lost the trail of Count Pappenheim.

Renaud, whose disappointment vexed him to utter low imprecations, caught sight of Armand-Louis.

"Ha, ha!" he said, "they are having a chat below there."

His horse leaped forward; but the marauders, who had perceived him, suddenly changed their tactics. Their attack was transformed into a rout. They vanished like a flight of pigeons before a hawk.

The gypsy had thrown herself across the body of her mother, weeping violently.

"Ah, Sir," she said at last, raising her head, "my mother breathes."

Touched with pity Armand-Louis had the poor woman laid upon a horse. A little life still remained in her, but the blood flowed in waves from her wound.

"We will do all we can for her," he said.

The young gypsy pressed her lips to the hand of the Huguenot, then uplifting her black eyes, she said:

"Tell me your name. I shall never forget it. I am called Yerta."

On their way Yerta told them that she belonged to a tribe of gypsies which followed Count Tilly's army and bought and sold horses. At the moment when the battle ended the poor girl and her mother found themselves

with two men of their tribe on the edge of a field. Suddenly a troop of cavaliers surrounded them. The two men ran off. The mother, seeing her seized by one of the marauders, threw herself in front of the girl to save her. A sabre blow stretched her on the turf.

"A Christian came and saved poor Yerta," she added in a sweet voice. "Henceforward my life is yours."

They laid the dying gypsy in a tent near the one occupied by Armand-Louis. Magnus was commanded to see that she wanted for nothing. Then Armand-Louis went forth to seek the king.

Torrents of light illuminated the bivouac of the victorious army. Torches and flames blazed everywhere. King Gustavus Adolphus, preceded, followed, accompanied by the huzzas of twenty thousand soldiers, had just visited the field of battle, where under his care all the wounded had been borne. He met the Count of La Guerche riding at the head of his dragoons. The garments of every warrior bore witness to the fight they had waged.

Gustavus Adolphus rode swiftly to the Huguenot's side and embraced him, saying:

"Colonel, next to God, I owe this victory to you."

An immense shout of joy greeted the king and the young colonel who rode with him.

"Ah," murmured Armand-Louis, "why is Adrienne not here!"

When he returned to his quarters he found Yerta weeping over the body of her mother. She arose and kissed his hands anew.

"She is dead," the gypsy whispered. "I am alone in the world."

All night long she remained seated in the tent beside her dead mother. She sang in a low chanting tone and wept. Her voice was so plaintive, her songs sad, that the heart of the veteran Magnus ached for her.

At daybreak two men of Yerta's tribe glided noiselessly into the tent. They wrapped the gypsy's body in a cloak and buried it in a remote and unmarked spot. Then they vanished furtively like birds of the night.

Twice or thrice during the day Yerta was seen haunt-

ing the tent of Armand-Louis. When he passed she followed him with her eyes. He stopped in front of her. Yerta began suddenly to tremble and tears bathed her face. When he was unmindful of her, she took the hem of his cloak and bore it to her lips.

Once, feeling herself quite alone, she stole into the Huguenot's tent. She watched an instant, glanced all about her and seeing one of his gloves lying in a corner she quickly seized it. Then she saw a medallion hung between two swords on the pole which supported the tent. She took hold of it with a kind of feline quickness, touched the spring of its gold lid and saw within the portrait of a woman. Yerta turned pale and sat down upon a chest. She studied the picture a long while in a kind of trance, then replaced it between the two swords, threw back the glove and glided out of the tent.

When evening came she had vanished. When Armand-Louis asked Magnus what had become of Yerta, Magnus pointed to a bird which was hopping from limb to limb on a tree nearby.

"Whither goes that bird?" he asked.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE WILES OF A DAUGHTER OF EVE.

Let us for a short while leave the Count of La Guerche and the Marquis of Chaufontaine at the court of King Gustavus Adolphus, where war will scarcely allow them long leisure, and let us return to Madame d'Igomer, of whom we have lost sight since the audacity of Magnus took Mademoiselle de Souvigny and Mademoiselle de Pardaillan from her clutches at the triumphant moment when she was leading them to St. Rupert's Convent.

It will be remembered that John of Werth, in obedience to the desire of the baroness, had promised to escort her in person to Prague, in which city Field Marshal Wallenstein had fixed his residence. The check she had received in the pavilion, in which she had passed the night, did not alter her resolution, and on the morrow she set out for Bohemia. Escorted, however, by the people of the baron, she left the General of the Bavarian troops before Magdebourg. She was sure of him and she wished only to have an accomplice not less ardent and obstinate in hate to keep guard over the city in which the two cousins had sought such a fatal refuge.

For the designs which ripened in her agitated brain the Baroness d'Igomer needed an all-powerful support. She needed this support if she were never to enter the palace toward which she directed her steps with feverish impatience, revenged at last and pride-blown with her triumph; and if, on the contrary, she appeared there conquered and shattered by her defeat, she nourished the hope of extracting the better part of this misfortune.

She was pursuing a double aim, therefore; first, to lose her rival; then, deprived of the sole love that had ever made her heart throb, to show to Renaud, by the glory of the almightiness toward which her ambition

aspired, what she was and what she had been willing to sacrifice to him.

"Then he will know me," she mused, "and perhaps he will regret me. I do not know whether I will be happy, but at least he will not be more so."

As she rode along she arranged her argument and prepared herself for the part of the victim, which she proposed to play.

The man whom Ferdinand the Emperor had created the Duke of Friedland, in recognition of the services he had rendered to the throne of Hapsburg, at this time held a position at Prague, whose brilliance was not less than the grandeur of his sovereign master. His military reputation equalled Count Tilly's and his pomp and wealth surpassed all that had been hitherto known. Now for some time in disgrace, he possessed, in the retreat he had chosen in the centre of his domains, a court which a mighty king might have envied. Around him swarmed a very people of officers devoted to his fortunes, and which his prodigal hand entertained magnificently. He had sixty pages and fifty guards attached to his house.

The most noble lords considered it a happiness to be admitted to this fairy palace, which was reached by six vast porticos. Gentlemen of the best houses aspired to the honor of serving him. His treasures sufficed for all; and in this royal solitude, on which were cast the eyes of Germany, his ungovernable ambition meditated new glories.

Not in the whole empire, from the shores of the Elbe to the Rhine, from the Baltic Sea to the mountains of Tyrol, was there a soldier who did not know him, not a commander who did not respect or fear him. His name was a standard. At his call not a man who could handle a sword or a musket, who was not glad to undertake a new campaign under his command. From that moment they felt certain of victory. He possessed the great art of rewarding liberally whoever served him. He had been seen by some magic to improvise armies, and suddenly to arise at the head of numerous regiments in a

devastated province, where on the preceding day there had been naught but fugitives.

He had his chamberlains and his majordomos, his great officers and his ambassadors even as the Emperor. He was treated with as a crowned head. Disgraced by his master, because he was feared, he was not discouraged; a reverse to the imperial armies could restore to him his sovereign military power. Then, the Baroness d'Igomer had witnessed too much in a small number of years not to understand that war has its caprices. She did not know whence should come the thunderbolt that would replace Wallenstein on his pinnacle, but she was convinced that it would strike. She must, therefore, make sure of him before he became master.

The baroness had not forgotten a certain evening in Vienna, the occasion of a ball, when the first lieutenant of the Emperor had considered her with glances which his familiars had never seen him bestow on anyone. He had spoken to her and that stern voice at which the whole world trembled had softened; that austere and sallow visage had flushed. Something had throbbed in the breast of the savage general which was strange to him. At this time Madame d'Igomer, married only a few days, was in the bloom of her springtime; but she was in wit already a woman and no detail of that night had escaped her. What more glorious triumph for her youthful vanity! But now in the memory of this day, what an indignation she felt toward herself for having yielded to the love inspired by a poor gentleman, almost an adventurer, when at a nod of her head she could have had the master of Germany at her feet! Despairing and still inwardly bleeding from the wounds of her heart, which wondered why it had given itself up, Madame d'Igomer wished to learn whether her sun-like beauty could yet work upon Wallenstein the charm and seduction which were to serve her new designs.

Her first care on arriving at Prague was to pay a visit to him. With what art did she not approach him! How she curtsied over the mighty hand which the duke proffered to her! With what sweet and suppliant inflection of the voice did she tell him that she was a widow, alone

and almost without protection. In the midst of the abandon which surrounded her, desolate as a fledgling whose nest has been swept away in a storm, she had recollected the illustrious and all-powerful Wallenstein, the pride of Germany. The terrible and magnanimous warrior had spoken to her kindly in the past, she remembered, and her first impulse urged her toward him. Cruel enmities pursued her. She had left much rancor at the court of Sweden, where melancholy days had enchained her. But if her presence might stir any danger against the man whom the whole empire admired, she was ready to flee and to drag out the last years of her life within the icy shadow of a convent.

Two tears fell from her eyes and rolled like pearls down her rose-tinted cheeks. Wallenstein raised her up, saying:

"Enter, Madam. This palace is yours."

This was a first success. She counted on gaining others. Soon she contrived to interest the Duke of Friedland in imaginary woes which permitted her to shed tears that accentuated her beauty. Pity mingled with the spontaneous sentiment of seduction to whose empire her host yielded. It was not long before chamberlains, majordomos, equerries and pages, in fine, a whole people of gentlemen and captains, learned to reckon with the new star which shone above Prague.

Among all those who surrounded Wallenstein, one alone was really to be mistrusted. This was an Italian, Seni, who consulted the stars to the profit of the Field Marshal. But Thecla pierced this man with her first glance. One evening she asked the astrologer to come to her apartment. She showed him a jewel of priceless value, suspended from a chain of gold, in a casket.

"This is a tribute which my sex pays your science," she said. "I dare to hope that it will not prove unfavorable, and that the planets under your laws will accord me a part of the friendship I ask."

The astrologer could not misunderstand the smile and the glance which accompanied her words.

"What have you to fear from the planets which con-

hide their secrets to me," Seni replied. "You shine as brilliantly as Venus and the stars are your sisters."

"That's what you must sometimes say to His Highness, the Duke of Friedland; and I shall not fail to swear to him that you are never mistaken."

That very evening the conjunction of Mars and Jupiter demonstrated to Wallenstein that the arrival of Madame d'Igomer at Prague was a good auspice. The stars rejoiced.

The correspondence which Madame d'Igomer had kept with the army of Tilly enabled her to know before everybody the taking of Magdebourg. This was nothing to her. But what did interest her, was that Mademoiselle de Pardaillan, who, she was aware, was in the beleaguered city, had not succeeded in escaping from it. Of this she was assured by a courier sent on the same evening the catastrophe had occurred. Now they must endeavor to get the captive out of Count Pappenheim's hands, send her to Prague, where the baroness would have every liberty to dispose of her according to her caprice. But to attain such a result it was first of all necessary to secure the co-operation of Count Pappenheim. The plan of the baroness was promptly conceived. One morning she presented herself before the Duke of Friedland, her face bathed in tears.

"What horrible news I have learned," she said, falling to her knees. "I'll not leave this spot till you grant me the favors I ask."

"What is it? Do you not command here?" said Wallenstein, seating her beside him.

"Magdebourg is taken!"

"Well, was it not a rebel city? The arms of the Emperor have punished it."

"Ah, but you do not know. Two persons of quality, two young girls, who are kinswomen, have fallen into the power of Count Pappenheim. Count Tilly, who knows their name and fortune, claims them. To what citadel will they be driven? To what shameful treatment will they be exposed? Despite all I have suffered in Sweden, I cannot forget that I slept under their roof."

"Generous Thecla, always good and devoted!"

"Obtain from Count Tilly that Mademoiselle de Pardailan and Mademoiselle de Souvigny be delivered to you, that your palace be their prison. If he asks for gold, gold has never cost your liberal hand anything. Here I shall watch over them. More, I will secure their eternal salvation. If God wills it, I'll free their souls from the night of heresy. Thus shall acquit my heart's debt."

"What do you wish me to do, Thecla? Must I send one of my officers to Count Tilly? He knows me I'll answer for his consent."

"And who would refuse the wish of the Prince of Wallenstein? But, do more. Allow me to go myself. I shall go to meet Count Pappenheim, and when the two captives see me they will believe themselves saved. Ah, if I could but restore these strayed souls to the bosom of our Holy Mother Church!"

"But," returned Wallenstein, "this journey which you would undertake will separate you from me for a long time. You are going to see a man laden with the laurels of victory; and what am I, except a soldier who is forgotten?"

"You are the Duke of Friedland; he who has conquered ever, he whom the stars protect. Wallenstein has deigned to lower his glance to me; and Wallenstein thinks that I can be dazzled by any but him! Ah, why is he not poor, forsaken, miserable, betrayed by men as he is by the Emperor, that he might learn the extent of my devotion!"

The Duke pressed the head of Thecla to his heart.

"Ah," she thought, "formerly it was the arms of Renaud which held me thus."

Madame d'Igomer set out. She bore a letter signed with the mighty name of Wallenstein, and an escort of honor.

The letter, which was for Count Tilly, advised the conqueror of Magdebourg that the Duke of Friedland desired the presence of Mademoiselle de Pardailan and Mademoiselle de Souvigny at Prague. He was also notified that they were kinswomen of the Baroness

d'Igomer, the grand-mistress of his palace. Great presents went with the letter, which Madame d'Igomer did not deliver without saying a word about the ransom, the greater part of which should revert to him who had the largest right to booty. Count Tilly yielded and there remained only to rejoin Count Pappenheim, who had taken time by the forelock.

"He insisted on escorting the prisoners in person," said the old general. "Therefore, do not lose a minute, for on learning of the capture of Magdebourg, the Emperor appointed Count Pappenheim to the command of a body of troops which is to fight in Saxe.

Madame d'Igomer, provided with this knowledge, conferred with John of Werth.

"I know him, whom they call The Soldier," the baron explained. "He's a man mulish in mad resolutions. I should like you to tell me where he got the reputation for chivalry. The two captives are lost to us if you do not find the weak point in his cuirass."

"No cuirass is without flaw. Trust me to discover the one in his. Grant only that Mademoiselle de Souvigny come to Prague, where I reign, and I give you my word she shall be yours."

"My sole fear is that Count Pappenheim will refuse to leave either her or her cousin."

"On your conscience, do you believe that he still loves Adrienne?"

"No. Time and separation have dissipated this dream of a day. But he knows that I love her and he has promised the Count of La Guerche to be her guardian."

"'Tis a question of honor, then. I dread it less than a question of love. Let me kindle a desire in this passionate soul and I'll direct the flame whithersoever I please."

"You have the gift of miracles," said John of Werth, smilingly.

"No; but I have the gift of hate. Now arrange matters so that I may meet Count Pappenheim as soon as possible."

Thanks to an exceeding assiduity, John of Werth and Madame d'Igomer caught up with Count Pappenheim

toward the close of the second day thereafter. An hour later Thecla was announced to the general.

"Ah, a command!" he said, reading the dispatches which the baroness had given to him.

"The Emperor relies on your devotion."

"He has the right to rely on it, since the King of Sweden is in Germany. But perhaps you are not aware of my position here?"

"I know all. Read!" and with a hardy hand she held out the letters of Wallenstein and Tilly.

"Surrender Mademoiselle de Pardailan and Mademoiselle de Souvigny to you?" he continued, after glancing at both letters. "And my word of honor?"

"And your interest?"

The general and the baroness looked each other steadily in the eyes.

"Let's have no big words," pursued Thecla. "Let us call things by their names. There are two young girls. One of them you loved for a day——"

"Ah, you know it?"

"I am a bit of a diplomat. A diplomat should know everything. That she loves the Count of La Guerche and that John of Werth loves her is a matter to be arranged between those gentlemen. You have no sword to draw for the one or the other. But besides Mademoiselle de Souvigny there is Mademoiselle de Pardailan, and here's an affair to which you have not, perhaps, paid sufficient attention."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that Mademoiselle de Pardailan, Countess of Mummelsberg, through her mother, is in consequence almost a German, and that her title is from the crown of Austria, one of whose heroic servants is yourself. Being the sole daughter and heir of the Marquis of Paidailan, a man for whom the Pactolus flows in Sweden, she is gifted to flatter the pride and win the love of the greatest lords in Germany. It is known that eyes see her only to admire and see only her when the two cousins are together."

"She is truly charming," murmured Count Pappenheim.

"Do you believe," continued Thecla, drawing nearer to him, "that prisoner of Emperor Ferdinand as she is, the master of the Empire would hesitate to give her to him who has so valiantly served him? What domains would then be added to the estate of Pappenheim! It is true that the Marquis of Chaufontaine adores her, and I have been told that Count Pappenheim met the marquis at Le Grande Fortelle."

Count Pappenheim bit his lips.

"And that would forge bonds which nothing can destroy. Did he not brave you? Did he not make you undergo the first check, which he who was afterwards called The Soldier endured? That is what one may call a title. When you were still thinking of Mademoiselle de Souvigny, have I not heard it related that in a town near Malines, Renaud of Chaufontaine boldly killed one of your men, and a fine blade at that! Ha, ha! the Marquis of Chaufontaine has a right to Count Pappenheim's respect. He struck you; bow!"

"Madam," he said, "you have uttered words that no man should have spoken with impunity. You are a woman. I forget them."

"No. Don't forget them!" retorted the baroness.

"But what would you have me do?"

"What I would do if I had the honor to be called Godfrey-Henry of Pappenheim."

"Then speak, woman, speak!"

"A man has insulted you, a foreigner, an enemy of your country and your Emperor! This man loves a woman, whom the chances of war have cast into your hands, and you ask me what you are to do? A truce to vain words. Are you one of those schoolboys who are governed by childish scruples? Do you desire to reserve for this Frenchman, who mocks at you and that only because he is conquered, one of the most beautiful spots that Germany has to offer her glorious sons? Mademoiselle de Pardaillan is there and you hesitate! You speak of your word given to the Count of La Guerche. The order of Count Tilly frees you from it, and besides, what do you owe to the Marquis of Chaufontaine? Is it gratitude for the story I've heard him

tell twenty times of the singular figure you made at La Grande Fortelle, when fifty carbines threatened you from all sides?"

"Chaufontaine told me that——" but Count Pappenheim could say no more. His blood rose in his throat and suffocated him.

"Why do you not be page to Mademoiselle de Pardaillan to conduct her to this happy rival? Does the noble blood of Pappenheim stir at last? Fortune has placed a daughter of birth in your hands, like a dove in the claws of a kite. Don't surrender her. Besides, you will be doing a good work, a pious deed. Remember the Countess of Mummelsberg, who gave life to Mademoiselle de Pardaillan was a Catholic. You restore to the foot of the altar the victim of heresy who desecrates it. A fortune for yourself, a soul for heaven."

"I yield," cried Count Pappenheim, trembling.

"Then Mademoiselle de Souvigny and Mademoiselle de Pardaillan follow me to Prague?"

"To Prague or Vienna, whither you will."

"You know what race of man is the Duke of Friedland. None more faithful to his friends. I shall tell him that his desire was your law, and perhaps the day is nigh when you will see him again at the front of the Imperial armies. Count, behold in me the ambassadress of the Field-Marshal Wallenstein.

"To-night I take the road to Saxony, while you follow the one to Bohemia. Is your presence to be announced to the two cousins?"

"'Tis unnecessary. Tell them simply that you are no longer charged to accompany them. I will arrange all else."

"And I may rely on your good offices with her who may be called the Countess of Mummelsberg?"

"If she be not yours, she will be no other's. Yet there is Renaud of Chaufontaine——"

"God will grant us a meeting, and I will answer for it."

"Till we meet again, then, Count."

"Till we meet again, baroness."

A moment later Madame d'Igomer was with John of Werth. She informed him of the result of her interview with Count Pappenheim.

"Did I not tell you?" she cried. "I found the flaw in his cuirass."

CHAPTER XV.

PRISONERS IN A PALACE.

In taking leave of Mademoiselle de Souvigny and of Mademoiselle de Pardaillan, Count Pappenheim had good heed not to tell them all he knew. His conscience murmured a little, but hatred and ruffled pride stifled its complaints. He gave as reason for his departure an imperative order from the Emperor and did not risk any lengthy farewells. He was leaving the two cousins, he said, in the hands of a trustworthy person. When he had gone Madame d'Igomer hastened toward Prague, using all caution to keep her presence a secret, and it was not till they reached the princely residence of Wallenstein that the two captives learned into what hands implacable fortune had cast them anew.

As soon as they alighted Thecla ran toward them with open arms, joy in her eyes and the fresh smile of a child on her lips. A chill froze the blood of Adrienne in her veins.

"Why these outstretched arms? Why these kisses?" she said to her. "We are your prisoners. Let us have no comedy!"

"Is there a St. Rupert's Convent here, too?" added Diana.

"Ah, it is my destiny, then, not to be loved by those I love," returned the baroness, her eyes filling with tears.

Madame d'Igomer had the gift of tears and she used it on all favorable occasions. Tears became her features, to which they lent a new seductiveness and gave her, besides, a semblance of feeling of which she profited well.

It was not without purpose or for the sole pleasure of playing her part of hypocrite till the end that she had

such a dulcet tongue for the two cousins. She had an ulterior aim. She wished to parade her tender and patient affection for the two prisoners before the eyes of the Duke of Friedland, and to pose as the victim of black calumnies.

Thus she hoped to gain a double end, to inspire her protector with an inalterable horror for the creatures who repelled the most striking testimonies of an amiable regard and to bedeck herself with a veil of unhappiness and virtue.

As soon as the two cousins had been settled in a pavilion, where without any sign of it, they were subject to the most active surveillance, Madame d'Igomer allowed herself to be caught in tears by Wallenstein twice or thrice. To the pressing inquiries of the Field Marshal, to whom these tears were glorious and priceless as pearls, Thecla first offered a plaintiff resistance; then, as if suddenly yielding under the weight of her woe, she cried:

"Oh, I do not know any punishment more intolerable to a tender soul than to be misunderstood."

Her tears redoubled and Wallenstein at last tore from her the secret of her dolours.

"You know," she said, "how much I love Mademoiselle de Pardaillan and Mademoiselle de Souigny, above all, the former. You remember in what terms I mentioned them to you. Ah, what would I not have done to secure their happiness! My desire to make them happy would have inspired me even to entreat you to send them back to the Court of Sweden, if it were not against the laws of war. They are hostages, and one may hope that their presence here will detach from the party of Gustavus Adolphus a lord whose experience would admit him with honor into the counsels of the Emperor."

"Madam, you talk like a politician," said the duke, kissing her hand. "Your lips possess all wisdom as they hold all charm."

"I am inspired in your interest," answered Thecla. "I have then conquered myself by respect for this imperious duty; but I wished in any case to render their sojourn here agreeable. I lavished all upon them. I do not

speaking of my tenderness, it was already theirs; nothing could change it. But, alas! nothing has been able to melt the ice between us. Choice robes which might have pleased them, and of which I deprived myself, caresses, distractions, invented for them alone, courtesies, supplications, all they have repelled."

Madame d'Igomer bore her dainty hands to her eyes. The duke gently drew them away, saying:

"And still you weep and do not abandon these unworthy creatures?"

"I love them. Then another thought sustains me. Do you understand me, my dear duke, when I tell you that the welfare of their souls is as dear to me as that of their bodies. I know that they are attached to two French gentlemen of poor birth, who are seeking their fortune in a foreign land, not being able to earn a copper in their own land. I met both of them at the time fate kept me in Sweden. I observed their manners and mind. They are rather soldiers of fortune than gentlemen. They are said to be brave, but what soldier in the armies you have led to a hundred victories is not? Beyond this, they have nothing in their favor. By what witchcraft have they seduced the hearts of these young girls I know not. Ah, I have often believed that some sorcery——"

"Be sure of it," interposed Wallenstein, whom the astrologer Seni kept respectful of all superstition.

"I did not dare to tell you," pursued Thecla, shivering, "but there is something in their way of thinking and talking, which astonishes, afflicts me. Despite myself, I see in this the influence of some mysterious power. I, who saw them enter into life, do not recognize them. Surprised, alas, even indignant, I wished to rescue their wandering brains. Irony and perverse obstination answered me. Would you believe that one of them, Mademoiselle de Souvigny, has returned the kindnesses of her uncle, the Marquis of Pardaillan, by the most bitter disdain? Whether well or ill advised by the sectarians, who abound at the Court of Stockholm, he had the happy thought to destine her for the hand of one of the most celebrated captains of the empire——"

"Celebrated captains, did you say?"

"You know, my lord, that when the sun does not shine in the heavens, the stars shed rays."

"The name of this star?"

"Baron John of Werth."

"And she refuses him?"

"That is not all. Another famous captain, who profits by the eclipse of the sun to climb to the stars, is enamored of *Maidemoiselle de Pardaillan* and asks her hand."

"The name of this amorous star?"

"Count Pappenheim."

"One of my best lieutenants."

"That's a commendation, which Count Pappenheim, I am sure, would not exchange for an elector's crown."

"Then he loves *Mademoiselle de Pardaillan*?" continued Wallenstein, kissing Thecla's hand anew.

"He adores her. But as her cousin acts with John of Werth, so does *Mademoiselle de Pardaillan* with Count Pappenheim. She declines the honor of so grand an alliance."

"You are right. This inexplicable obstinacy must be the effect of witchcraft."

"Ah, my lord, the two unfortunates were reared in the heresy of the Reformation."

Wallenstein crossed himself devoutly.

"One might abandon *Mademoiselle de Souvigny* to her blindness by weariness of her obstinacy," pursued the baroness; "but another interest commands firm, unctuous action with *Mademoiselle de Pardaillan*. Let us not forget her origin, that she is a subject of the empire, to which she owes faith and allegiance. Let us not allow the Countess of Mummelsberg to fall into the hands of a Gallic adventurer. My conscience would never absolve me of such a weakness. But if I have the courage to desire the good of the one, why should I not have the same charity for the other. The same perils threaten each."

"Ah, your devotion knows no limit!"

"Lost here in this world by their obstinacy, must they be forever lost in the next? You cannot understand

how this sorrowful dread haunts me! I have not a minute's peace. I would do anything to save them."

"You have every grace, every charm. God has inspired your immortal soul in a cell which reminds one of heaven."

Thecla forgot that her hand rested in that of Wallenstein and fell into a profound reverie. The Duke of Friedland contemplated her in admiration.

"Ah," she said suddenly, raising her head languidly. "I often thought that if the light of our holy religion illumined the souls of Mademoiselle de Pardailan and Mademoiselle de Souvigny, they would listen to me."

"You have a holy thought. The austere silence of a convent will teach submission to these souls troubled and inspired to revolt by the detestable doctrines of the Reformation."

"You would approve me, then, my dear duke, if, with the aim of restoring them to the faith, I should place each of them under the direction of a holy man who would remove them from the theatre of the world?"

"I would advise you to such action. When gentleness is powerless, when softness is exhausted, chastisement must be applied, as one uses iron and fire to root out the brambles and brushwood of a field to make way for the plough."

"Shall I tell you all my fears? I feared for an instant that you wished to ravish them from my anxious affection. Will you authorize me to do all to bring them back to a sense of their duty? Will you allow me to direct them, according to my will, along the paths which shall seem to me the safest towards the goal I labor to attain?"

"As you will. The young ladies are yours."

"At least may their happiness repay me for the pain they have cost me!" sighed the baroness unctuously.

This conversation summed up the lot which she had reserved for the two prisoners. But before having recourse to the rigors of a monastery, Madame d'Igomer must learn whether she might not conquer and seduce these proud souls by the fascinations of luxury, the enticements of pleasure. What a triumph of voluptuous-

ness of this hate-corroded heart if her rival should succumb to temptation, if, entwined in the embrace of Count Pappenheim in the whirl of a dazzling ball, Mademoiselle de Pardailan should betray at once her love and her faith! Such would be the best and sweetest vengeance. She must first corrupt her, then strike. The baroness marveled within herself that she had not thought of this sooner.

Thenceforward she took care to conduct the two cousins to all the entertainments by which Wallenstein beguiled his inaction and displayed the magnificence of his court. The gowns they had brought with them were replaced by much richer apparel. All that could dazzle their eyes and fascinate their young hearts was lavished upon them. They breathed an atmosphere of pleasure. Music, the dance, the hunt, feasts followed one another unceasingly and a group of gallant gentlemen, gathered around them, kept a concert of flattery.

Each evening Adrienne and Diana returned wearied and, as it were, stupid with excitement, to their apartments. But their brave souls remained untainted. Their simple honesty ran foul of every trap. After an evening in the tumultuous, brilliant palace, they knelt down humbly and prayed. Then all stain of the day departed from them. The schemes of Madame d'Igomer were baffled.

Thanks to the connivance of his accomplice, Count Pappenheim, though conquered at Leipzig, could communicate at liberty with Diana. The hour for hesitation had passed. The Grand-Marshal returned from the battle-field, his soul ulcerated with defeat. He had seen his own cuirassiers fall under the blows of the very dragoons to whom he had surrendered their leaders. He had seen the Marquis of Chanfontaine in the thick of the fight. He had been able to judge the weight of his sword-arm. He had been forced to retreat in the mad disarray of his own troops. Should he, therefore, abandon the heiress, who was now offered to him, to this hated enemy?

"Never!" cried Count Pappenheim. "He defeated me. 'Tis my turn to defeat him and have my revenge!"

Rooted in this new resolve he balked no longer at any

dial reception. The innate loyalty of Adrienne repugned any thought of treachery. She had been confided to the count by Armand-Louis and she believed the German worthy such a trust. His bearing toward her reaffirmed her in full; but what was her amazement when Diana, all terrified, informed her one day of a conversation she had held with their rescuer.

"Ah," she murmured, "I know not which is worse; the brutal arrogance of John of Werth, or the gallant insidiousness of Count Pappenheim."

"Tell me, what is wrong?" asked Adrienne, anxiously.

"He came to me just now. I gave him my hand. Suddenly he threw himself at my feet. I was so astonished I could not think. He declared he loved me; that nothing should ever kill his love and that to possess me there was nothing he would not do. Ah, now I know that it is no longer you he threatens, but myself. I saw all clearly in the ardor of his speech. 'Tis Madame d'Igomer who has knotted this plot. She has sold us to John of Werth and to Count Pappenheim. It is not an abduction as at Brandebourg; it is imprisonment in a palace. God save us!"

Several things helped Adrienne to understand that Diana was not in error. She saw that in this immense edifice, apparently all devoted to pleasure, the most dire slavery awaited them. For them it was the world's limits. No sound, no word, no memory of anything that happened beyond the six porticos where the guards of Wallenstein kept watch was for them. Robed in lace-laden silk, bedizened with gold and silver, strolling under glittering chandeliers, they were still slaves. They did not know whether in the whole world anyone remembered that they had lived in it.

At a ball one evening, Madame d'Igomer approached Diana, whom for some time she had affected to address as the Countess of Mummelsberg. It was the night of a great celebration. Seated sadly at the side of Adrienne, Diana gazed at, without seeing, the crowd of courtiers who moved to and fro in the brilliant halls.

"What!" exclaimed the baroness, taking Diana's hand,

"not a jewel on this pretty arm, dear Countess of Mummelsberg? 'Tis a treason to beauty!"

Then she unlocked a jewel of rare price from her own arm.

"There," continued the baroness, "is a bracelet which Count Pappenheim presented to me. He will thank me for having perceived that upon your wrist, paler than marble, it will shine with all brilliance."

Quick as lightning Diana tore off the jewel and flung it far from her.

"I'll have naught from you or from him," she said.

"Good!" whispered Adrienne, pressing her cousin's hand.

Despite her natural self-control, Madame d'Igomer paled. She forgot to weep and straightening up, retorted:

"Though you will accept nothing from me, I am resigned, no matter at what cost to my feelings. But that you should refuse it from him passes my understanding. Count Pappenheim will return to Prague in a few days and we will then see whether the Countess of Mummelsberg will dare to refuse the marriage ring which he will offer her at the foot of the altar.

It was as if a bolt from heaven had fallen upon Diana.

"A marriage ring? Count Pappenheim?" she gasped, brokenly.

"At present we await a courier who will bring the consent of the Emperor," answered Thecla. "Be ready, therefore, for this ceremony."

At this juncture the Papal Delegate, who had been sent into Germany to combat heresies and strengthen the Catholic faith in faint hearts, appeared in the gallery. He was a Prince of the Church, famed for a devout and noble character. Breaking of a sudden through the group that surrounded her, Diana of Pardaillan threw herself at his feet, crying:

"My lord, you are the refuge of the weak and the defender of the down-trodden. I come to you. Have pity on me!"

"Daughter, stand up," said the prelate.

"Not until you have heard me. You who represent

Christ on earth, will you permit a minister of the Gospel to bless a marriage into which they wish to force me and which I hate. Tell me, my Lord, will you allow Catholic altars to be desecrated by such a sacrilege? I was brought up in the reformed faith. If it be wrong, let the apostles of truth convert me, but without violence or subterfuge. By my mother's descent I am Countess of Mummelsberg. I own ten villages and twenty castles. They may sequester them. I do not complain; but they cannot erase from my 'scutcheon the arms of my ancestors. In heart and desire I am promised in marriage to a French Catholic gentleman, who is fighting for Sweden, the ally of his country. I claim the privileges of my birth and my rank, the right to dispose of my hand according to my will. I entreat your pity, my lord. Look you that I never see the day when I awaken as Countess of Pappenheim because it has pleased an impious servant of the God of Mercy to unite me, in despite of my tears and of my cries, to a man I do not love!"

"In the name of him who has power to bind and unbind," said the Papal Delegate, extending his hand to Diana, "and who has invested me with a part of his authority, I condemn and curse the unworthy priest who would do violence to this woman. Stand up, my child, and fear not. I am but passing through the city, but my brother, Archbishop of Prague, will watch over you. Let all who hear me now, remember; the Countess of Mummelsberg is under the protection of the Church!"

The Cardinal went on his way slowly, blessing the people with his right hand as they knelt before him. Madame d'Igomer said nothing; she had recovered her composure. As soon as her glance met Diana's, she muttered:

"Yours, the victory now. But all things pass away with time, even delegates!"

Then noticing that everybody was scanning her, she smiled quickly and offered her arm to Diana, with:

"You are a bit feverish, my child. You had best retire."

The two cousins went to their apartments, not soon to quit them. Hours, days, weeks glided by. No one

visited them; no one addressed them. The silence of the cloister followed upon the noisy merry-makings in the palace. One might fancy that the service was done by shadows. But the tortured souls of the prisoners found a balm almost in the solitude. No odious visage offended their sight; no hypocritical smiles seared their hearts, no hateful words wearied their ears.

"How unhappy Armand-Louis and Renaud must be," they thought frequently. "They are seeking us without hope."

Sitting at the window they watched the flight of the birds and the clouds. Some of them went north. Why had they not the wings of birds! Why might they not sail away on the clouds!

But while they were buried far from the world in the palace of Prague, various grave developments of war, confirming the prophecy of Madame d'Igomer, were about to summon Field-Marshal Wallenstein back to theatre of battles. After Count Tilly's disaster on the plains of Leipzig, on September 7th, 1631, a second defeat cost him his life at the passage of the Lechs, which he had defended in vain. The star of Gustavus Adolphus was in the ascendant and the humbled arms of the House of Austria recalled at last the devotion and the reputation of the exiled general.

Madame d'Igomer had been from the first informed of the secret negotiations between Ferdinand, terrified by the enemy at every outpost, and the Duke of Friedland, who was entreated to take in hand the cause of Germany and to leave the retreat of his Titanic pride.

When she was consulted by him, Madame d'Igomer easily divined the counsel he expected from her.

"Ah," she said, mingling a trick of sadness and enthusiasm in her tones, "I will forget myself and remember only you! An empire hangs on the brink of ruin, an implacable enemy stands over it, threatening with a final exterminating stroke. Should you, in a just, though excessive resentment, refuse it your stout sword and thus precipitate it into the abyss? You alone are left to fight against Gustavus Adolphus. You are the stronghold of the empire, the defender of the Catholic

world. Think not of my anguish, but arise. Shall not all the conditions it may please you to dictate, be accepted? Lo, soldiers, captains, generals call upon you and have no hope save in you! They cry in acclaim upon you and stretch their swords to you, impatient to avenge the insult done the German flag. Princes, electors, kings intrust to you their people and their crowns. No, on the day you leave this palace I shall weep alone. All Germany will shout for joy. They will behold victory in you and an immense escort of courtiers and gentlemen will attend you to the frontiers insulted by the Swedes. Hesitate no longer. Be gone, my lord, rejoin the few troops with which Pappenheim still holds his ground. To-morrow 'twill be an army and let astounded Europe see that if he is the Soldier, you are the General!"

"Ah, Thecla!" cried Wallenstein, "you alone love me."

Then he gave orders that all preparations for his departure be set forward with dispatch.

On the evening of the day that saw him re-enter the lists, Madame d'Igomer asked permission to restore to the two prisoners some of their liberty.

"They braved you, almost insulted you," he said frowning.

"It is true," she replied, "but some slight tokens make me believe that their hearts are opening to better feelings. You know I am obstinate in my affections. To remain at Prague has become odious to me since I know you must depart. The hours I cannot consecrate to you (alas, the heart of a hero belongs to his army, rather than to her who loves him), I shall endure far from the noise of courts. But into this retreat where I shall live with your memory, suffer that I take with me the Countess of Mummelsberg and Mademoiselle de Souvigny. I have a hope that the hour of repentance will soon strike for them."

Wallenstein could not resist the tones of his enchantress and on the day that the conqueror of Tilly learned that he was to combat a man who had never met defeat, a page entered the apartment of the two cousins and announced to them that a carriage awaited them in the

courtyard of the palace. They followed him unresistingly. A few minutes later their carriage passed out of Prague.

Looking out at the sides of the curtains they discovered a dozen cavaliers riding at arms with them. They advanced swiftly.

Madame d'Igomer, who had not seen them at their leaving, did not appear during their journey.

Two days after their exit from Wallenstein's palace, which they did not at all regret, the two cousins, having seen many hills and forests disappear behind their carriage, halted at twilight in the yard of a great castle, which towered upon the knob of a mountain.

"I wonder where we may be," said Adrienne, measuring with a glance the high walls which surrounded them.

"You are at Drachenfeld Castle, my home," replied Madame d'Igomer, appearing upon the threshold, "and you behold me all happiness to receive you."

"Then, madame," replied Diana, "the happiness is all your own."

CHAPTER XVI.

DRACHENFELD CASTLE.

Drachenfeld Castle, where new dangers lay in wait for Adrienne and Diana, had at once the aspect of a citadel and of a convent. There were galleries and ball rooms as in a palace; a donjon fit for a stronghold; a chapel with cloister and cells as in a monastery. That all might be in harmony in this singular habitation, one might meet at random in its chambers men armed with sword and musket, pages robed in satin and velvet, beautiful women plying fans or playing the lute, almoners absorbed in pious meditation.

Within a month's time the two cousins had become acquainted with life as it was at Drachenfeld. The evening was given up to the dance and to various entertainments, in the devising of which Madame d'Igomer showed remarkable invention. The morning was devoted to exercises of prayer. If the afternoon were clear they went boating on beautiful lakes or walked along broad avenues through the forest. There was the hunt also. But if it rained they went to some chapel to behold a good monk surrender himself to the fervor of a religious exhortation. At times, and when Madame d'Igomer had slept ill, the sermon was replaced by music.

It did not seem as though the inconsolable Thecla regretted Wallenstein very much. She did not lose much of her time in repining. Perhaps her sojourn in the country was accountable for this.

To a Franciscan father was entrusted the charge of extirpating the abominable roots of heresy from the souls of the two cousins. He persecuted them most religiously.

The management of the castle devolved upon a thin, lemon-hued, ghastly gallows-dog of a fellow. Diana shivered the first time she saw him. She kept the im-

pression of this sinister profile stored in a corner of her memory.

When she heard the name of Mattheus Orlescopp pronounced, she was frozen with terror.

"'Tis the terrible man from Bergheim," she cried.

In truth it was Mattheus Orlescopp, who, after his defeat at Ravennest Castle, had come to Drachenfeld for his revenge. The men had escaped him, but the women were left. He had really a double offense to avenge, and Madame d'Igomer might well count on his devotion.

It will be remembered that, thanks to the precautions of Carquefou, Mattheus Orlescopp had hung for some time on the hook that had been Renaud's torture in the green room at Ravennest. Mattheus had been released only a few hours after the departure of the fugitives. The guard whose duty it was to bear the starveling nourishment to the captive, found the master of Ravennest, pallid, frozen, mad with rage and pain. Once cut down he did not lose time in attempting to catch up with the cavaliers, who had a full day's advance upon him. He hurried away to tell all to John of Werth.

The explosion of his hatred and fury was such that John of Werth understood at once that he had some mettle in him. Far from reprehending him, he congratulated him on his escape and sent him to his accomplice, Madame d'Igomer, with a letter, which contained only these words:

"Here's a scoundrel I can recommend to you."

No more was necessary to induce the baroness to engage Mattheus Orlescopp. When he found it to his interest, Mattheus could exhibit a terrible candor. He concealed none of the circumstances from Madame d'Igomer of the events which had brought him into Renaud's life at Bergheim and at Ravennest. What he had just done, far from revolting the baroness, gave her an idea of what she might expect from such a man on occasion.

Their hates were friends from the first bound. As soon as Wallenstein's departure to join the imperial army was decided, she determined to leave Prague for Drachenfeld and to confide the command of the castle to Mattheus Orlescopp.

Mistress now of Diana and Adrienne, at Drachenfeld, she was like the hunter who keeps a pretty decoy bird in a cage waiting for the partridges to come and be killed. In this instance the partridges were Armand-Louis and Renaud. She was sure that none could keep a better guard over this cage than Mattheus Orlescopp.

A hideous smile rendered the face of Mattheus still more frightful when he took the keys of the castle.

"The idiots!" he murmured; "they had me in their hands and they allowed me to live!" He suddenly stamped his foot with force. "But I made the same mistake. The next time I'll profit by experience."

In the first days of his installation at Drachenfeld, Mattheus called Madame d'Igomer to one side.

"My duty is to speak plainly to you," he said. "Permit me, my lady, to sound the depth of things. It is quite true that you do not love the Countess of Mummelsberg?"

"Oh, no," murmured Thecla.

"But there is some one else towards whom your feelings are even stronger. I mean Renaud de Chauffontaine. Am I correct?"

"You are."

"Why do you persist, then, in keeping Mademoiselle de Pardaillan hidden like a light in a bushel? Why do you not proclaim, by trumpet call, if need be, that she is at Drachenfeld and that she is your prisoner?"

"He would fly hither."

"That is not the only thing. If he comes, he will not come alone. And at one swoop the Baroness d'Igomer, John of Werth and Mattheus Orlescopp, their unworthy servitor, will be avenged. To accomplish this miracle it will be enough that Armand de la Guerche and Renaud de Chauffontaine show themselves within musket range of the castle."

The look which Mattheus threw at Madame d'Igomer made her shudder.

"Ah," she said, "you are a terrible man."

"No, madame, I am a logical man; and I strive above all to merit the good opinion which my lord, John of Werth, entertains of my humble self."

"Do as you will," said Thecla. "You have my full permission."

"Then I will answer for everything,"

At times Madame d'Igomer was absent for several days. On these occasions she went to the imperial camp in great mystery. No one knew of this save Mattheus, who remained absolute master of the castle. He had spies throughout the country for ten leagues around, beating up all the roads and returning to him with reports of what they had learned. They had orders to spread the names of the two prisoners broadcast, so that it might soon be a secret to no one. Something in this way should reach the ears of Armand-Louis and Renaud, and attract them to the shadow of the towers of Drachenfeld. This was what Mattheus hoped for.

The departure of the baroness discontinued all amusements; no more dancing, almost no music, but sermons in abundance, pious prayers and conferences, during which the Franciscan endeavored to convert his flock. After long days of controversy, if he had gained nothing, the worthy monk would cross his arms on his big paunch, saying:

"The devil still holds; but I shall do so much that in the end I shall have exorcised him."

Then still rolling on his short legs, still smiling and casting benedictions, he proceeded with his preachments.

As yet there was no news of Armand-Louis or Renaud.

In the absence of Madame d'Igomer, there was a kind of domestic guardian within the castle, in the person of a ceremonious and formal dame, who had the figure of a musketeer, yellow hair, sickly eyes, a square head and the legs of an ostrich. Her aim in life was to embarrass the existence of others with a thousand little difficulties. With her each hour had its destined purpose, which no human power or event could influence her to change. Madame de Liffenbach had but one dogma, the rule; and one faith, etiquette. She always spoke in a voice low and soft as a sighing wind. But this apparent sweetness concealed the stubbornness of a mule. Nothing escaped her. Her long legs took her everywhere, and her eyes, a blurred blue in color, shot glances of a lynx.

Adrienne and Diana were placed under her special care. Madame de Liffenbach did not allow them a minute's peace. Only at night could they converse freely; and even then not easily, for their rooms were separated by a gallery. As long as day lasted the old woman, robed in an old-fashioned gown, instructed them in the degrees of respect to be shown to different persons of the court, according to the rank they occupied. She varied the subject by little discourses on the etiquette in vogue in the Capital of the Electorate of Bavaria, and exhortations on perfections of grace and the merits of penance. By crafty turnings, she took text from these conferences to insinuate that Baron John of Werth and Count Pappenheim would make their happiness in this world, and assure their salvation in the next.

"Always the same tune," murmured Diana, who was not listening.

"And the same words," added Adrienne.

One of the pretensions of Madame de Liffenbach was to make Diana and Adrienne believe that they were in no sense prisoners. Captives? By no means. Who could have noised so calumnious a report abroad? Had they not full liberty to walk in the castle gardens? To pluck fruits there and eat them? Were they not seen in the state halls on concert days, and in ball attire on evenings when there was dancing? If it was required of them to be attended by grave and silent persons, was it proper for young ladies of quality to promenade alone? If they were not allowed to leave the grounds of Drachenfeld, the reason was that all sorts of disreputable folks were abroad in the country. All that was done was prompted by the single purpose to secure their care and comfort in this asylum of virtue.

When Madame d'Igomer returned to Drachenfeld things took another turn. The young gentlemen saw the great doors of the castle open to them, and more than one leaned gallantly on the chair of the charming Thecla, while the viol, the theorbo and the lute filled the apartment with melody. Meanwhile Adrienne and Diana lost neither the Franciscan's sermons nor Madame de Liffenbach's visits.

As time flowed the color of health gradually vanished from the fair faces of the two cousins. Days followed days, weeks followed weeks. Spring had passed, Summer was at the height. The prisoners were no longer heard to laugh or sing. When they conversed they dared not confide to each other their dread; and when in the morning they kissed each other, after a long tearful night, they spoke of the reposeful sleep they had enjoyed.

They could not banish the thought that Armand-Louis and Renaud were still trying to liberate them. Diana had learned from Adrienne the nature of Mattheus, and fearing that the permission they had to write to the Marquis of Pardaillan was a snare, they never told all.

In the interim, a truce, as is often met with in the history of old wars, had stopped hostilities between the belligerent arms for some days. There had been no cessation of fighting since Leipzig. How many brave officers would never again respond to the clarion call! How many soldiers lay hurriedly buried under a handful of earth. Nobody knew how or when this war, begun so many years ago, would terminate. Religious fanaticism commingled with political interests had kept it alive. Armand-Louis and Renaud had had their share of the common glory and danger; but they considered all days lost which did not engage them in the rescue of their loves. Until now all their attempts had been fruitless, or, what amounted to it, interrupted by the imperious necessities of war. The intervals between sieges and struggles were too brief to permit them to undertake an expedition into the heart of the provinces occupied by the enemy.

Yet they neglected nothing; but they had learned nothing. None of the dangerous sorties they had made right and left from day to day had afforded them the information as to which city or fortress held within its walls the fair women for whom they were ready to shed every drop of their blood.

At the first rumor in camp of the armistice concluded with the Commander-in-Chief of the Imperial troops, hope was reborn in the hearts of the two brothers at arms. They presented themselves to Gustavus Adolphus

at once and asked him as a favor to send them to Wallenstein to negotiate the exchange of prisoners.

"We have known for some little time," said Armand-Louis, "by a letter addressed to an old companion in arms, the Marquis of Pardaillan, that the two captives have been taken to Prague, at the palace of the Duke of Friedland. It is perhaps our only chance to see Mademoiselle de Souigny and her cousin. Perhaps we may learn at what cost we can regain them."

Without replying, the king wrote and signed a dispatch, in which he endowed Armand-Louis with the power of plenipotentiary.

"Depart," he said, embracing him, "and that with all speed. My conscience would reproach me for every minute I caused you to lose."

Nevertheless neither Armand-Louis nor Renaud wished to set out without having seen the Marquis of Pardaillan.

"You have permitted us to devote our lives to the welfare of your two daughters," said Armand-Louis. "God gave them to us; He has retaken them. We shall have neither truce nor rest until we have recovered them."

"Ah, if it were not for you," said the old nobleman, taking them in his arms, "how far hope should be from my heart."

Armand-Louis and Renaud communicated their purpose to him.

"The Duke of Friedland is at Nuremberg," said Armand-Louis, "we shall go to Nuremberg."

"And if my daughters, if Adrienne, be not there? If he refuses to give them up to you?"

"When diplomacy dies," exclaimed Renaud, "we cry 'Long live the sword!'"

"Ah," murmured the old marquis as the tears streamed down his cheeks, "the sword has proved treacherous to me and to you!"

"God above sees and judges us," replied Renaud. "Be of good hope. I promise you that as long as a heart beats in my bosom, as long as my hand can bear a sword, this heart and sword are consecrated to the liberation of Mademoiselle de Pardaillan."

"Bring back my daughter," said the venerable old man, touched by Renaud's ardor, "and you will be received by a father."

These words flooded Renaud's heart with an immense joy. He felt as though the glorious fire which had animated the souls of his ancient heroes, the Rolands, Galaors, Cids and Tancreds, was enkindled in his veins. Nothing seemed impossible to him now. He kissed the hand of the Marquis of Pardaillan and said:

"If your daughter be not restored to you," he cried, "it is because I am dead."

CHAPTER XVII.

PROPOSITIONS AND PROVOCATIONS.

An hour after this short interview, Armand-Louis and Renaud, followed by Magnus, Carquefou and Rudiger, were on the road to Nuremberg. They were not long in reaching the Imperial camp, where a trumpet announced their arrival.

The Duke of Friedland had taken residence in the most vast castle in the vicinity of Nuremberg. The same luxury which astonished Germany in his palace at Prague, surrounded him in this stopping place whence the cannon's roar could not be long in summoning him. In the antechambers and court yards the same gilded crowd of pages, equerries and chamberlains was to be seen ; guards, dressed in the colors of the house, were stationed at the doors. A very people of lackeys ran hither and thither. He kept open house. Hundreds of officers, from all parts of Germany, were enrolled under his standard, attracted at once by the splendor of his name and his magnificent bounties. His army increased like a ball rolled in the snow. Tents stretched away in the plain. Every soldier who had survived the disasters of Torquato Conti and Count Tilly rejoined him. Provinces lately impoverished furnished him with men and money.

There were neither entertainments nor pleasures now. He had kept naught of his former habits but the pagantry which astounded and that superb pride which made him the equal of princes. Discipline had returned and with it confidence. He hurried naught and left naught to chance. The best generals had rallied about him. Among them was Count Pappenheim, who, covered with blood like a lion fresh from his prey, reorganized in Wallenstein's camp what was left of his Walloon bands and his unconquerable cavalry.

While awaiting the hour for fight he had long consul-

tations with the chief of the army. John of Werth on his side enlisted in regiments the flood of adventurers which the bait of new battles and the hope of plunder urged toward Nuremberg. They came from Spain, Hungary, Poland and Italy. They all felt that the time was pregnant with great events. The heart of Catholic Germany was beating at Nuremberg.

Europe's attentive eye watched anxiously the manoeuvres of the two famous adversaries, who, before measuring their strength, prepared themselves with an excess of precaution. Each had a wonderful prestige to maintain. Each had to meet like chances in the uncertainty of the strife.

When Armand-Louis entered the Imperial camp a man was in conference with the general and was marking different points on a chart with his finger. It was sufficient to have but barely seen him either in the thick of the battle or the brilliance of a ball to recognize Francis-Albert, Duke of Lauenburg.

"Then," said the Duke of Friedland, "you are certain that eight thousand men, led by the queen, are on the march to the camp of Gustavus Adolphus?"

"I was leaving the king's tent when the courier of the queen arrived with the news," replied Francis-Albert.

"These men may be still on the shores of the Baltic Sea?"

"No, my lord; scarcely a few days separate them from your camp. They are Finlanders, Upsalanders, in a word, Swedes, the bravest troops you ever met on the field of battle. What is more, the corps commanded by General Banner and Duke Bernard of Saxe-Weimar have left their cantonments. Make haste before these important reinforcements have given your adversary the advantage in numbers."

"But am I not waiting the Lorraines of Duke Charles, the Spaniards garrisoned on the Rhine, the Bavarian regiments of the Elector Maximilian, the Cossacks of King Sigismund? Why should I make haste? Strong as the king may be, I shall be his match, and I promise you to annihilate him at the first stroke!"

"God aid you in this noble resolve! No one in the

Catholic world, saved by your army, will be happier for it than he who speaks to you. But France may come into the lists. Even now her arms approach Alsace; you may then regret that you did not destroy the audacious King of Sweden."

"France is afar off, Gustavus Adolphus is near. If any menace springs up in the west, the battle which will embarrass me of this enemy will soon be fought. You, Lord Lauenburg, will return promptly to the king and fail not to inform me in case anything important should arise."

"What I have done, I shall do always," replied Francis-Albert, bowing.

He raised a heavy arras which hung in the corner of the room and disappeared behind its folds. A man was waiting for him at the door of the palace.

"Are the horses ready?" asked the duke.

"The horses?" said Captain Jacobus in a growling tone. "Two men have just reached camp—the Count of La Guerche and Renaud of Chaufontaine. I'm not going away now."

The duke hesitated.

"Listen," continued the veteran captain, "the truce suspends hostilities, but I have an old debt to pay, and I'm a good debtor. To-day the whelps, afterward the wolf."

"Then we'll not go," said Francis-Albert.

Madame d'Igomer was at Nuremberg with the Duke of Friedland. She was at once informed of the arrival of Armand-Louis and Renaud by a dispatch from John of Werth. She did not wish them to have a conference with Wallenstein during her absence. She felt that the struggle begun at St. Wast and continued by the terrible episodes of St. Rupert's, Magdebourg and Ravennest, was about to assume a new phase.

"These are the two adventurers of whom I spoke to you," she said negligently to Wallenstein. "Hunters follow the deer's trail, but it has pleased His Majesty, the King of Sweden, to invest them with the solemn office of ambassadors. Honor them by receiving them in presence of all your officers."

This desire of Madame d'Igomer was accomplished

At noon on the morrow two officers escorted Armand-Louis and Renaud to the palace. Chamberlains, equerries and pages crowded the antechambers and the grand stair way. The envoys of Gustavus Adolphus walked between two lines of musketeers. A double door swung wide admitting them to a hall thronged with gentlemen.

Quite at the end of the hall Wallenstein sat in a gold armchair, much as a sovereign prince giving audience to his court. Beside him in a magnificent robe of golden brocade was Madame d'Igomer.

Renaud saw her and their glances crossed.

"We are lost!" he murmured to his friend.

Armand-Louis shivered; but well dissembling his emotion, he presented his credentials to Wallenstein, who at once perused them.

"The exchange of prisoners will be made," he said then. "Man for man, officer for officer. One of my aides-de-camp will give you a list of the Swedes fallen into our hands by the fortunes of war. You are at liberty, Sir, to remain at Nuremberg until all these conventions have been ratified."

Wallenstein bowed slightly as if betokening his departure.

"But that is not all," said Armand-Louis quickly.

Madame d'Igomer exchanged a glance with Wallenstein and smiled. The duke sat down.

"Two women have been taken captive by the Imperial troops at Magdebourg," Armand-Louis continued. "They are Mademoiselle de Souvigny and Mademoiselle de Par-daillan. I come to treat of their ransom, if such is necessary."

"Count Tilly is dead and affairs are no longer as he left them," replied Wallenstein haughtily. "We have more gold, thank God, than we can use for ourselves or our army."

"If you keep them as prisoners of war, Sir, at least accord us a fair exchange."

"Have you any daughter of a great house, any German princess in captivity in the Swedish camp? If you have let us have the names and we will see."

"Ah," roared Renaud, whose blood began to boil, "do

you gentlemen think we are having a war with women?"

Wallenstein frowned. Madame d'Igomer advanced abruptly and said:

"Perhaps these gentlemen are not aware that, thanks to the worthy Franciscan monk, which His Eminence the legate of the Holy Father has supplied, Mademoiselle de Pardaillan and Mademoiselle de Souvigny are opening their hearts to the holy truths of our faith? To restore them to those who are bred in the poison of heresy were to endanger their eternal salvation. Politics and blood must yield to religion."

"Mademoiselle de Souvigny a Catholic!" cried Armand-Louis.

"Mademoiselle de Pardaillan a Catholic!" added Renaud.

He was about to say that this conversion mattered little to him, who gloried in the fact that he was of Romish persuasion, when two officers appeared in the hall. The groups of gentlemen retired and parted at their approach.

"The most striking sign of their conversion," added the Duke of Friedland, "is that Mademoiselle de Pardaillan and Mademoiselle de Souvigny have been affianced with Count Pappenheim and Baron John of Werth."

Armand-Louis and Renaud turned livid. Count Pappenheim and John of Werth were standing before them. The bow of ribbon embroidered by Adrienne's hand hung at the hilt of the baron's sword.

"What, you!" cried Armand-Louis to Count Pappenheim.

"I do not remember that I promised anything to the Count of La Guerche in the regard of Mademoiselle de Pardaillan," answered Count Pappenheim. "It is perhaps well to recall that, at Prague, as well as at Vienna, she is Countess of Mummelsberg, subject to His Majesty the Emperor of Germany; and that, if it pleases the Emperor Ferdinand to grant me her hand, it pleases me to accept it."

"Ah," murmured Armand-Louis, "you are always the man of La Grande Fortelle."

Count Pappenheim's visage colored. The purple lines of the crossed sabres stood revealed upon his brow.

"I believe you met this man at Magdebourg," he replied, haughtily throwing back his head.

"Traitor!" roared Renaud.

A deadly pallor overspread the features of Count Pappenheim as he measured the Gaul with his glaring eyes.

"That word will cost life to either one of us," he said.

"Well, why do you tarry? You have your sword. We've met often before this. If you hate me as I hate you, you must burn with ardor to end this quarrel. Come on!"

"I follow you," said Count Pappenheim advancing a step.

"And I forbid you to leave this place," cried Wallenstein. "Who commands here? Who is the representative and delegate of the Emperor? If it please the Marquis of Chaufontaine to forget his office, it suits me to remind him that I am master at Nuremberg. Sheathe your swords! Count Pappenheim, Grand Marshal of the Empire, you have a command which necessitates your presence in the army and does not permit you, unless at my order, to risk your life in single combat. You will do as you see fit, if the chance of war sets you face to face with your enemy on the field of battle. Until then, obey!"

Count Pappenheim, trembling with rage, rammed his half-drawn sword into its scabbard.

Armand-Louis, noticing that Renaud did not do likewise, seized his comrade's arm.

"I can wait," he murmured, "be thou patient, also."

The Duke of Friedland cast his imperious glance over the assembly. All were silent. Madame d'Igomer smiled. smiled.

"Gentlemen," said the duke, "I believe the conference is ended."

"My lord, is that all the answer you have to make?" said Armand-Louis. "Remember, I speak in the name of Gustavus Adolphus and I demand justice."

"Sir, I have nothing to add."

Armand-Louis saluted Wallenstein and withdrew. As he passed Count Pappenheim he said:

"You promised me on your honor to guard Made-moiselle de Souvigny. Au revoir, count!"

"Au revoir, gentlemen," replied Count Pappenheim.

Meanwhile Madame d'Igomer kept smiling and fluttering her fan. John of Werth curled his mustache. He alone had not spoken.

"I must see Captain Jacobus," he said to himself. "In the interim I will send a messenger to my friend, Lord Mattheus. I fancy that my two gentlemen will beat about the country. They shall not take me unawares."

No words can express exactly the feelings that tortured Renaud. The furtive glances which Armand-Louis cast upon him told him how precisely his own fury and hate were reflected and echoed. Unhappily their anger had no vent; their office and the haughty answer of Wallenstein did not allow them to seek the immediate reparation of arms for the injury they suffered. They must bide their time and stomach the outrage until the day when their brave swords might be freely drawn.

"Don't talk to me of Pappenheim," said Renaud. "Whether traveler or soldier 'tis always the same man."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE LITTLE HOUSE AT NUREMBERG.

That same evening, while Renaud was walking up and down before the house, which had been assigned as their dwelling, and as he vented his rage in various expletives, a page approached and invited him with much discretion to follow him.

"Whither dost thou wish to lead me?" asked Renaud, who was not in a mood for adventures.

"To a place where you will not regret to have gone," replied the page.

Carquefou, who was nearby, munching the wing of a pheasant, lifted up his nose.

"Marquis," he said, "'tis my mind that this is not a safe country at sunset. Hereabouts they tell some awful tales of devils and hobgoblins with divers human rascals intermixed. Stay at home."

"It concerns Mademoiselle de Pardaillan," the page murmured close to Renaud's ear.

"What! Why didst not speak sooner? Be off, I follow thee."

Renaud ran rather than walked upon the heels of the page, whom he drove thus more briskly. Carquefou flung away his bone.

"I feel just like a good sleep," he said to himself.

He arose with a sigh and followed his master at a distance. Renaud never looked behind him.

Carquefou saw him go out of the city, dive into a hollow road, reach a coppice in whose midst an avenue opened, then disappear suddenly behind the door of a pavilion, hidden under a thick mass of foliage.

Carquefou took a turn about the building, scraping the deadwood under his feet. No light could he see. Doors and windows were hermetically sealed.

"Humph!" murmured Carquefon, "this looks like the house of a fairy or the abode of an ogre."

He leaned against a tree, facing the door by which his master had entered the pavilion. Here he waited.

"At the slightest noise I begin the attack," he said to himself in a low voice.

Meanwhile Renaud was ascending a dark staircase. The page held his hand. He felt a carpet under his feet which stifled his footfalls. His heart beat till he could scarcely breathe.

"Diana! I shall see Diana!" he thought. A portiere was drawn aside, and in a room dimly lighted he beheld Madame d'Igomer. Renaud recoiled.

"You are afraid of a woman, then, marquis?" she said.

"I believed that I was summoned in regard to Mademoiselle de Pardaillan. This is treachery!" cried Renaud.

"You have not been deceived. It concerns Mademoiselle de Pardaillan. But I do not know that you have been told you were to see her."

Madame d'Igomer trembled as she spoke.

Renaud had never seen her so pale and worn, not even on the day he took his leave from her in St. Wast Castle.

This vindictive woman, who obeyed hate's every inspiration, seemed to have lost almost all her strength. Her white robe revealed the heaving of her bosom. The pallor of death veiled her forehead and cheeks. Nevertheless Renaud, while studying her, drew open one of the folds of the portiere, as if about to retire.

"What do you fear?" asked Madame d'Igomer sweetly. "Only a woman and a boy are here."

"But that woman is you," said Renaud.

"If you mean that the fate of Mademoiselle de Pardaillan is in my hands, it is true. But it is for you to decide whether she shall be free to-morrow."

"I am to decide! What must I do? All my life blood—"

"You would shed for her, eh?" interrupted Madame d'Igomer. "I know that. Why do you tell me it? You take bad means to heal the wound which bleeds in my heart."

Thecla fell exhausted into a chair. Her face was the

color of snow. Tears of unfeigned suffering flowed from her eyes. Renaud took her hands and felt them tremble in his.

"If you wished it," he said, "you might have me spend my whole life in blessing you."

"Listen," replied Madame d'Igomer. "I fancied I was much stronger than I am; much more rooted in hate. I have seen you and I know not what flame has suddenly warmed this heart which has throbbed but once. What shall I say? Do I not know the influence, the charm that has conquered it? All this feeling that I had forgotten suddenly returns upon me. Long months of mourning, tumultuous with the spirit of vengeance, are obliterated: of all that I have suffered or dreamed, of my tears of madness and despair, only you remain."

For a moment Thecla was silent. A mingling of astonishment and sadness flooded Renaud's soul. He was about to speak, but she anticipated him.

"Know me as I am," she continued. "Whatever you will have me, I will be. I can no longer be your companion in life, the proud wife to walk, leaning on your arm. I shall be your servant, your slave. None will be more devoted, more humble, more happy with the lot you dole her. If you wish me to love Mademoiselle de Par-daillan, I will love her. But do you love me, or if this effort be impossible to you still, do not love her at all any more and abandon this cursed idea of giving her your name! Tell me, do you remember nothing of the past, and am I too exacting in asking of you a little pity? Recall our words of whilom times. Ah, if you have lost the memory of them, my sad heart still burns with it. You do not know how deeply I loved you! Alas, I did not know myself. See what you have made of me, into what an abyss I have fallen! Do you not owe something to her whom you have abandoned and who, if it were not for you, perhaps——. But I will not reproach you. I bless the evil day I met you, the day that saw me love you. Of the happiness I tasted in the past I ask only the shadow, the remembrance. At this price there is nothing you cannot obtain from me. Place your hand in mine.

Swear that Mademoiselle de Pardaillan shall never be Marquise de Chauffontaine, and my confidence will go so far as to tell you: She is free!"

"But I love her!" cried Renaud.

"What!" exclaimed Madame d'Igomer. "You are in my house. She is still captive. You dare—— hold, you are very bold or else mad!"

"In turn, hear me, I pray you. What has she done to you? Is she not entirely innocent?"

"Innocent? She who tore you from my arms!"

"Then punish me, but spare her. Has she not been good and true to you? She is not yet twenty. Let not her youth be drowned in tears!"

"Do you fancy that she has wept alone?"

"Ah, you are implacable. Neither beauty, innocence nor misery affect you. Why strike her, when I am here? What shame do you propose to me? Betray her when she has said, 'I love you!'"

"Did not some one, named Renaud, say the same words to me?" she almost shrieked.

This last cry was the last straw. Madame d'Igomer had arisen. That expression he had seen in her face at St. Wast had returned. Thecla showed not the slightest trace of the emotion which had softened her a minute before.

Renaud went toward the door without answering.

"Then," said Madame d'Igomer, "you do not renounce the hand of Mademoiselle de Pardaillan?"

"Never!"

"Then she shall renounce yours!"

Renaud turned as if to question her.

"Marquis, I do not detain you any longer," said Madame d'Igomer, striking a bell and ordering the page to reconduct Renaud.

"Now," murmured Madame d'Igomer, "I'll let Matheus Orlescopp do his will."

Renaud found Carquefou standing against the tree he had selected as his post for observation.

"All goes wrong," he said in reply to Carquefou's interrogative glance.

"Sir," replied the honest philosopher, "while there's life, there's hope."

Then understanding that his master was not in a talkative mood, he wound his cloak about him and followed in silence.

CHAPTER XIX.

FOUR AGAINST ONE.

The conditions of exchange had been ratified. There was nothing to detain Armand-Louis and Renaud at Nuremberg. They took leave of Wallenstein and rode out of the camp.

Within arrow-shot of the moat they met a cavalier who saluted them as he passed. It was Count Pappenheim. He bore his cuirass and a great cloak. Before Armand-Louis or Renaud had time to answer his salute the count was far away.

"The bird of prey flies to the left—a bad sign," said Carquefou.

"Even without considering that the country is full of ambushes," murmured Rudiger.

Their route led through a wooded country, sewn with gorges and solitudes of pine and birch trees. A low wind blew the mass clouds wandering across the sky. They thickened and they scattered in turn. Armand-Louis and Renaud felt the influence of this melancholy mood of nature. They meditated and did not converse.

Magnus was looking ahead one moment, behind the next, now to the left, then to the right.

Rudiger on his side kept his eye on everything.

"If I die, which is probable," murmured Carquefou, "I should not like to die in such weather or in such a country. I should be too cold."

This said he wrapped his cloak, which fluttered in the north wind, closer about his thighs.

The fog ran along the heather; a flock of crows streaked its gray mass in a sinister and heavy flight.

A cavalier passed like a phantom along the road, then

another, then a third; then the three united in a group, preceding Armand-Louis and Renaud by one hundred paces.

Magnus cast his eyes toward the end of a gorge his little troop had just crossed. In the distance, almost invisible in the mist, three cavaliers appeared on foot.

"That makes six in all," he thought, "that's nothing."

Nevertheless he tried his pistols to see that they slipped easily from their holsters.

Almost at the same moment, Rudiger who had tried his weapons also, and was peering searchingly on every side, observed on the right, in the plain, where grew a low copsewood, three other cavaliers.

"Nine," said he, pointing them out to his neighbor.

Magnus quickly turned his eyes to the left, where a small wood lay, along the border of which they were passing.

Night was coming on quickly. Yet among the pale trunks of the birches they distinguished three shadows, which glided into the silent depths of the forest.

"That makes twelve," thought Magnus. This time he primed his pistols, and, drawing his sword from the scabbard, let it hang naked in his hand. Rudiger had taken the same precaution.

Carquefou, who was watching them, imitated them scrupulously. Then leaning over toward Magnus' ear he asked:

"Why?"

Without saying a word Magnus pointed toward the four points of the compass.

"Oh!" exclaimed Carquefou.

"Remark," said Rudiger, "that they are approaching us."

Magnus said nothing; but for himself he took note that within the last minute each group had been augmented by one man, making the whole number sixteen.

The next instant, the four men in advance turned around; those behind hurried forward. By a simultaneous movement the two troops on the right and left galloped toward the road.

Armand-Louis and Renaud were caught between four fires.

In this district where no inn, house, or cabin could be seen as far as the eye could reach, two bunches of black pines arose on either side of the road.

Magnus had struck Armand-Louis on the shoulder, and Carquefou cautioned Renaud, when a cavalier suddenly issued from the pines. He held his head high, his sword in his hand.

Carquefou gave utterance to a cry.

"I see, gentlemen," said the cavalier smiling and saluting them with his sword, "that you have recognized Captain Jacobus."

"Ah, bandit!" roared Renaud.

"Now, if it please you, let's settle our accounts."

But as Captain Jacobus raised his pistol to give the signal of attack to the four bands, which were within thirty paces of the gentlemen, a cavalier came bounding along the road and putting a silver whistle to his lips sent forth a shrill call.

A great clashing was heard in the thick of the fog and the road was covered with cuirassiers, who, sabres drawn, surrounded the assailants.

"Captain Jacobus, lower arms," said the cavalier. "I am Count Pappenheim."

Captain Jacobus cast his astonished glances in all directions and found his bands surrounded by a wall of bronze.

He shoved his sword back into the scabbard.

"My lord," he said coolly, "you are the stronger, but I very much fear that you've committed a blunder."

Count Pappenheim pointed toward Nuremberg.

Captain Jacobus reunited his men, the serried ranks of the cuirassiers opened and the whole pack scurried away like jackals who have heard the roaring of a lion.

The cuirassiers formed ranks behind Count Pappenheim and, riding at their head, he escorted Armand-Louis and Renaud to the end of this dangerous road. At the first streaks of dawn they saw a town, whose houses speckled each side of the way.



“The stone turned and they entered the subway.”—p. 93.

"The Swedish army is before you, gentlemen," he then said, "and the armistice expires to-morrow."

As the two Gauls bowed, he added, addressing himself to Armand-Louis.

"Are we not quits, now, count? The woods you have just passed through, have they paid the debt of the camp of Stettin? Has Count Pappenheim remembered Count Eberart?"

"Yes," replied Armand-Louis.

"Then, gentlemen, good luck to you. And, if it please God we shall meet on the field of battle, there you shall see that I forget nothing."

Count Pappenheim saluted the two gentlemen very proudly with his hand, and, followed by his cuirassiers, was soon lost in a cloud of dust.

"A strange man," said Renaud, looking after the soldier as he rode away with his men.

"Truly a strange man," replied Armand-Louis, "in him is to be found a mixture of all good and all bad qualities. The former are his by birth, the latter the result of the events and the struggles of his life. He has the germ of the best and highest virtues, the passion for glory, love of country and religion, faithful beyond all proof to his emperor and his flag, untamably brave. But all this is envenomed and corrupted by a dangerous ambition, an implacable pride, a contempt for men and a disdain for all rights. Yesterday he rode through a city in flames and made his horse pass over the corpses of ten thousand Germans. What did it matter to him? They were only rebels and Protestants. The same day he resolutely risks his life for two women in a village, a prey to the drunken pillage of an army. Yesterday he aspired un pityingly to the hand of a noble woman, who repulsed him; to-day he saves his rival. Circumstances have made him what he is; ferocious, violent, capable of most terrible revenge, the most savage deeds. Then at times his soul awakens and magnanimity dawns. The tree seems to be withered, but it often drops ripe fruit."

"In faith," said Renaud, "if I ever kill him, I shall never have killed a more valiant warrior."

On the very day the armistice expired Armand-Louis and Renaud regained the army of the king. Immediately Armand-Louis requested an audience with Gustavus Adolphus.

A most audacious project had sprung up in his mind. He had served the cause of Sweden. He believed he had the right to serve his own now.

CHAPTER XX.

THE DRAGOONS OF LA GUERCHE.

After having detailed to the king the result of the mission, which had been entrusted to him, Armand-Louis asked His Majesty permission to speak of matters that were of no importance save to himself.

"Speak, my dear count," said the king.

"Sire, do you think I have so far served the cause to which you have devoted your arms, as to solicit a favor from Your Majesty?"

"Colonel, you know that I have not hesitated to proclaim before the whole army how much Sweden owes to you."

"Then, Sire, as I one day asked you for five hundred men to deal a final blow to the enemy, will you now permit me to look in the army for one hundred volunteers who will follow me whithersoever I may lead them?"

"If you mean to be their leader, I fear they may go so far that they will never return."

"It is quite possible. I must have soldiers who will retreat before nothing."

"This is a difficult undertaking, then?"

"So difficult, that it may well appear mad to any man who does not see the happiness of his life entailed in it."

"Explain yourself."

"A faithful servant drew me out of the hands of the Imperialists. Shall I do less for Mademoiselle de Souvigny than Magnus did for me? Mademoiselle de Par-dailan is beside her, subject to the same slavery. Her father weeps, my heart bleeds. M. de Chaufontaine and I have sworn to liberate them."

"It is to Prague, in Bohemia, in the heart of the enemy's provinces, I know not whither, you wish to go with one hundred men?"

"Yes, Sire. Honor is my law."

"Oh, I should have acted as you act in the past," cried the king, seizing the hand of Armand-Louis. "Go then! I should think myself unworthy of my crown if I did not say to you: Risk everything to rescue her whom you love. But after the king, the friend will add: Be careful to save the brave soldiers of Sweden. She has none too many."

As Armand-Louis was taking leave of the king, the door opened and the Duke of Lauenbourg entered. Armand-Louis stopped.

"Hostilities have recommenced," said Francis-Albert. "Two Hungarian regiments, which reached the Imperial camp yesterday, attacked a squadron of Finnish musketeers during the night. Two Italian regiments follow in their train."

"Your information is very exact," said Armand-Louis brusquely. "How did you get it?"

The duke who had not noticed Armand-Louis, turned toward him now and reddened. As he spoke Armand-Louis played with a chain of gold which hung at his belt. The flashing of the pure metal attracted the attention of the Duke of Lauenbourg, who was sore put for an answer.

"But you, Sir," he said at length with mingled anger and haughtiness, "you who ask such fluent questions, can you tell me whence you have this golden chain that glitters on your doublet? I have been looking for it for some time."

"Does the chain belong to you?" asked Armand-Louis quickly.

"It was stolen from me. By what strange chance does it come to be in your hands?"

"Ah, Sir, you have been searching for it for a long time, you say. Well, I have been just as long seeking its owner. Something tells me that there may be some relation, at least a whimsical one, between the accident by which you lost it and a crime committed near the royal residence some three years ago."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that this chain, which is yours and claimed by you so impudently, was found by me near Gothabourg, at the door of the house from which Margaret Cabeliau had

just been abducted and where, an hour later, I met you, my lord duke, for the first time."

"It must have slipped from my belt," stammered the duke, turning pale.

"Before the crime, then; because it was before the abduction of Margaret Cabeliau that I found this chain on the grass amid the hoof-prints of a horse—of your horse, my lord duke."

For an instant the Duke of Lauenbourg wished to return the stare of Armand-Louis. But as he was vanquished in this silent struggle he slowly lowered his eyes.

Armand-Louis then passed before him, saying in a condescending tone:

"Since the chain belongs to you, my lord duke, take it."

With a haughty gesture the Huguenot flung it at his feet.

Armand-Louis approached the king and murmured: "Sire, what do you think of this?"

Then believing that he had trod the worm in the dust, he went away.

"Well?" asked the king turning suddenly upon the Duke of Lauenbourg.

"If this man were not your guest I should have killed him," cried the duke.

"It is not so easy to kill the Count of La Guerche," returned the king. "But we are now concerned with this chain and not with him."

The blow had been a terrific one, not less terrific than unexpected. But the duke was alone and he knew that Gustavus Adolphus loved him. He made a sudden summons on all his native audacity.

"It is true, the chain is mine and I lost it at the door of the little White House," he cried. "Do not ask me what I was doing there. Remember only that Margaret was beautiful and I was young. All that could be done to stifle a love which fills the heart I had done. My efforts were in vain. Her image pursued me everywhere. Sire, was it my fault that I met her before you did? When a confidence, which I had not asked for, informed me that I had no longer the right to hope, you know not the anguish which tore my breast. I would have fled away, dis-

appeared to forget her who had become the soul of my life. An invisible but mighty thread drew me back to the places where she breathed and I drank the poison with the bitter pleasure of a heart which nothing can disen-thral of its love. Ah, a thousand times I felt that I was dying. When you were at her side, I, drunk with despair, prowled about her enchanted abode, which should have been my kingdom, my paradise, had Margaret so willed. My tears wet the grass as did the dew. She loved you and I kissed the traces of her footsteps. One day this chain fell. Ah, Sire, you were then with Margaret——”

An emotion he could not master stole into the king's heart. Could he who had felt love's full fever condemn a man who had suffered all its anguish? Francis-Albert knew Gustavus Adolphus too well not to guess at the slightest outward sign the trend of his sentiments. He felt that the best and cleverest defense was absolute frankness; and he resumed with an extraordinary vehemence:

“But if, Sire, you wish to have my whole confession, then know all. What tempests in a bosom all burning with a futile love! Yes, I admit it, I thought to avenge myself.”

“You?”

“Indeed I did. A thousand terrible projects crossed my mind. I knew not to which I should sacrifice the remainder of a miserable life. In you I saw the sole cause of all my suffering. It seemed that my greatest joy should be to see you dying, abandoned by all. I sought a means of appeasing my black grief in the sight of your ruin. Ah, if I acknowledge these nightmares 'tis because my awakening has dissipated them. I had not the strength and in spite of myself, when I wished to carry out these sinister dreams, I thought of the past and my cowardly heart trembled.”

Astonishment, anger, pity, all were pictured in the visage of the king.

Francis-Albert, who observed his mood even as he pretended to abandon himself to the feverish flow of his confession, soon went on:

“I did more. I visited your most implacable enemies. I saw Count Pappenheim, I saw the Duke of Friedland,

as I saw also him, whose army your sword scattered on the shores of the Lech. I was to march with them against you and in the conflict seek you out and die—or kill you. I heard your voice, a chill seized me, and this sword which thirsted for your blood I surrender to you. If it seems fit to you that I should die, strike!”

Francis-Albert had drawn his sword and gave it to Gustavus Adolphus.

“But when you strike,” he added, “at last do not forget that perhaps you do not owe me so much misery in recompense for the past. My cheek is pale to-day though my heart bleeds.”

This allusion to the scene of their youth, which had not been forgotten by Gustavus Adolphus, suddenly shook the king. His open and loyal soul reached the highest mercy as it understood all candor. The fearless confession of Francis-Albert had paved the way. What suspicion could live in presence of such an avowal?

“Take back this sword,” said the king holding his hand out to him. “It is Gustavus Adolphus who gives it to you and who asks you to keep it for Sweden.”

Francis-Albert gave utterance to a cry and raised the king’s hand to his lips. But when he had gained the door of the royal tent he shook the dust from his feet and slapping his scabbard said between his teeth:

“Thou hast given it back! Woe betide thee!”

That same day Armand-Louis convoked a general assembly of the dragoons of his company. A goodly number of them had fallen at Leipzig and on the shores of the Lech; but they had been replaced by other Huguenots who had flocked hither from all parts of France with the permission of Cardinal Richelieu. Never had a braver body of youth gathered about a captain. No hall was large enough to contain them all, so it was decided to have the reunion on the border of a wood where lay a quantity of fallen trees. These were the seats of the dragoons. That the truce was at an end filled the hearts of these brave gentlemen with hope. The hour of perils and battles was to be reborn. This repose of a few days irked even the least impatient among them.

“When do we sit in saddle?” asked one.

"Do you remain with the king or do we follow Rhinegrave Otto?" asked another.

"Whithersoever we go, let us be in the advance guard!" said a third.

When calm had been almost restored, Armand-Louis stood on the trunk of a felled oak.

"Gentlemen," said he, "I have need of a hundred men of will. I should have judged myself guilty of an insult to the dragoons of France had I addressed myself to the other corps of the Swedish army before submitting my request to them. It is no longer your captain who speaks to you. It is your brother in arms—a soldier. Therefore, speak as you will, without fear. We are not concerned with a matter of service."

"Will you lead the hundred men you need into battle?" asked M. de Berail.

"I shall lead them all into the heart of Germany, into the thick of the Austrian provinces, into the home of the enemy." A thrill of joy animated the dragoons.

"Now we begin to understand," added M. d'Aigrefeuille. "We may hope then to incur many dangers?"

"My friends," said Renaud, "the Count of La Guerche has confided his project to me. Such is it that the half of those who undertake the expedition have a chance of never returning."

"Then there'll be a shower of blows to give and receive," cried a young cornet.

"And a tempest of pistol balls as well," added Renaud.

"Monsieur de Chauffontaine, you speak like a good book," said M. de Berail. "If fate does not have me to fall on the way, we'll talk about this little journey over a pâté of venison. Write me at the head of the list."

"And do you think I wish to remain here?" cried M. d'Aigrefeuille. "If we don't risk our lives twenty times I'll consider you a man of ill faith and we'll cut our own throats. Have a care."

"Be easy on that score," replied Renaud, as he drew from his pocket a memorandum on which he wrote the names of the first two recruits. "The least that can happen you is to lose a leg or an arm."

"Put my name there also," cried the cornet.

"Do you think I will miss this pleasure party?" asked a gentleman burning with ardor to win his spurs.

"Write M. de St. Paer."

"And M. d'Arrandes."

"M. de Volras."

"M. de Collonges."

Renaud's pen lagged; the cries crossed one another in the fire of enlistment and grew more numerous.

"Oh, la, la!" cried Renaud, "my hands weary. We need one hundred men of good will. Let those who have a fancy to follow us have the goodness to pass to my right. We will count them."

All the men rushed at one bound to the right of Renaud. Not one remained on his left.

"Good!" cried Renaud, closing his book, "we won't count."

"I maintain my rank," said M. de Berail, laughing, "by right of age. Let the others draw lots."

"Let us draw lots," said M. d'Aigrefeuille, sadly.

A cornet placed his hat on a stone and each man hastened to throw into it his name inscribed on a bit of paper. The hat was half filled when M. de Collonges, who was quite young, knocked it over with a blow of his fist.

"We are stupid," he cried, "why draw lots? Let us all go—the more the merrier, and if we're all killed there'll be none left to be jealous."

"Truth sometimes comes from the mouth of a child," said Renaud. "What thinkest thou, captain?"

"I think," replied Armand-Louis, "that the entire squadron may pace whithersoever the company has made a way."

"What's better still," continued Renaud, "the more numerous we are the less we shall be remarked."

"There's a riddle I will not undertake to solve," said M. de St. Paer. "The important thing to know is whether you accept."

"I accept!" cried Armand-Louis.

Every hat was flung in the air. They cried:

"Long live the Count of La Guerche! Long live the

Marquis of Chaufontaine." They pressed around them, embraced them.. It was a very explosion of joy.

"And now that, thanks to me, everybody is of accord," said M. de Collonges, "may one with discretion ask whither we are to go?"

"We are going to Bohemia," repeated Armand-Louis, "and when we shall have reached there, this army of Wallenstein will be between us and the Swedes."

"It could not be more clearly said. We shall be as Daniel in the lion's den," said M. de Berail.

"With the distinction that Daniel was a prophet and we are but poor sinners."

"So that we have some chance of being devoured by lions."

"In faith," grunted M. d'Aigrefeuille, "I pity the immolators," and he clapped the heavy hilt of his sword.

"Now that we are in Bohemia," continued M. de Collonges, "what do we do there?"

"We seek out a stronghold called Drachenfeld Castle."

"Suppose we have found it. Then?"

"Gentlemen," said Armand-Louis, "in this castle dwell two ladies whom several of you have known; Mademoiselle de Pardaillan and Mademoiselle de Souvigny. They are kept captive; both their faith and their hearts are threatened. M. de Chaufontaine and I have sworn to deliver them or lose our lives. But the swords of two men, however devoted, cannot overcome all obstacles. This is why I have made call upon your chivalry. We will conquer together or perish together. As for me, gentlemen, I swear to return with them or not to return at all."

Three hundred swords suddenly flashed in the sunlight and this valiant body of youth, exalted by one of those bursts of enthusiasm which are the appanage of noble hearts and generous natures, made oath to devote their last drop of blood to the cause of Armand-Louis and Renaud.

"When you give the signal to set out, we shall be ready," said M. de Berail to Armand-Louis.

"Then, gentlemen," replied he, smiling, "have your

horses saddled and bridled to-morrow. You have one night left to say farewell to those you love."

Renaud was not the only one to whom Armand-Louis had confided his project. As soon as Magnus was informed of it, the old reiter, who held no enterprise, however dangerous, to be impossible, together with his comrade Rudiger, had set about beating the country with the activity of ants. At the end of the day they returned with three or four wagons loaded with a mass of Imperial uniforms, where, thanks to the skirmishes that were of daily occurrence, these objects were not wanting. Carquefou, who assisted at the unloading, opened wide his eyes at the sight of so many cloaks, coats, mantles, doublets and belts of the Austrian colors. There was enough to clothe an army.

"Great Jove!" he exclaimed, "for whom are all these things?"

"For us," replied Magnus.

Armand-Louis, who appeared then, congratulated Magnus and Rudiger on their excellent selection.

"We must begin with a ruse," said Magnus. "Force always comes soon enough."

"Always too soon," commented Carquefou, to whom this odyssey into the country of the enemy seemed like a defiance flung at Lucifer.

The disguise proposed by Magnus was in truth the only means for crossing the lines of Wallenstein's army without difficulty, or at least without too much danger. Nevertheless it required some effort to convince certain of the young gentlemen of this who could not bear the thought of shielding their skins under the hated cockade. They had never, they said, hidden either their names or their faces. They wished no mask.

"Gentlemen," cried Magnus, impatiently, "why do you not rather send word to the Duke of Friedland of the day of your departure and the road you are taking?"

At length the punctilious ones ceded and none thought of anything save of preparations for the morrow. An extraordinary animation reigned in the Dragoons' quarters during the whole night. Busy men came and went; some groomed their horses or furbished their arms;

others wrote farewell letters; while furtive sighs made their bosoms heave. The younger ones sang songs of their distant fatherland; others knelt in remote corners in prayer. Diverse though their occupations were, the same fire shone in every visage. Not for anything in the world would the soberest of them have renounced this mad expedition.

The rumor had spread to the Swedish camp and with it the fever. It was much feared that the most of these braves who were to take saddle at the first streak of dawn would never be seen again. But among the officers grouped about the king, a goodly number would willingly have joined them and none dreamed of dissuading them from their undertaking. At the first sound of the morning trumpet all the troop was afoot, beside their steeds. The whole army had gathered to assist at the setting out of the La Guerche Dragoons to hail them with acclaim. When they broke away, every hat flew in the air and a chorus of a thousand cries echoed to heaven.

The sun shone radiantly, the sky was in holiday dress. The three hundred dragoons rode proudly round the line of the camp and drew up in battle array before the tent of Gustavus Adolphus, who had come out to honor this picked body of men.

He uncovered and three hundred swords sparkled in the sun.

"Good luck and God guard you, gentlemen," cried the king with emotion.

"God give us victory as he gives it to Gustavus Adolphus," answered the dragoons.

The king embraced Armand-Louis, the bugles sounded and the troop rode on, their horses' heads pointed southward. Far away could be discerned the smoke of the Austrian outposts.

Magnus rode ahead. He acted as guide and was seeking to distinguish himself by leading the dragoons to Drachenfeld Castle by the shortest route.

He had taken the broadest and most frequented road.

"If we do not wish to be seen," he said, "we must not hide ourselves."

"We are like the Argonauts who went in quest of the golden fleece," cried M. de Collonges.

"With the difference that our golden fleece consists of two golden heads," corrected M. de Beraïl.

"What a conquest it will be for us!" added M. de Saint-Paer.

"We might also be compared to three hundred Persei going forth to the rescue of two Andromedas," said M. d'Arrandès.

"In faith, long live war!" cried M. de Volras gaily, "in that alone is life."

"When there's not death in it," Carquefou murmured low.

There was no dearth of talk; they laughed and made a great commotion.

"Gentlemen," said Magnus, suddenly, "let us not talk too much French now. We are in the enemy's territory."

He pointed out to the Huguenots a company of Croatian cavalry driving a herd of cows before them across the ford of a stream.

"The Rubicon is passed!" cried M. de Collonges, whose joy was so great that he made his horse perform a couple of pirouettes.

"Alas!" murmured Carquefou, and he sadly crossed himself three times.

CHAPTER XXI.

A HALT IN THE SHADOW OF A WALL.

The squadron rode on bravely without meeting any obstacle in a country mottled on all sides by the uniforms of a hundred foreign soldiers. Hardly an hour passed that they did not meet some of them. The most passed unquestioning. When it chanced that a captain interrogated Magnus, who, with Rudiger, had taken the white horse and clarion of a trumpeter, a reply was ever promptly vouchsafed. Sometimes Armand-Louis, who rode at the head of the cavaliers, was questioned.

One day they said they belonged to the army of Wallenstein, and that they were going into garrison in a place in Suabia. On the morrow, they were of the Pappenheim regiments, marching toward the frontier of Bohemia which was menaced by the Swedes. The next day, they were in the service of Duke Charles of Lorraine and they were making a flank march. According to the circumstances and the various officers they met, they were in turn Italian, Spanish, Hungarian or Polish.

Day by day they steadily advanced. Each time they broke in halt Carquefou sighed.

"We are as so many fishes with a hundred nets stretched in their pool," he said; "the weave is coming closer together."

Honest Carquefou's inquietude was felt by the others, but in an inverse sense. They looked upon it as a pilgrimage, or a journey in search of new scenes.

Some of the gentlemen complained. "Marquis, you have played upon our faith," said M. de Collonges to Renaud. "Where are the dangers? The battles?"

"Patience," replied Renaud, astonished to hear himself utter the word.

"You promised us a storm of sword blows," interposed M. de Berail. "I am looking for it, but in vain."

"Is Pappenheim a phantom?" asked M. d'Aigrefeuille. "You promised to let us see him."

"'Tis no longer an expedition, but a journey. We should have carriages," cried M. de Saint-Paer. "With a few violins and flutes we could give a ball," added M. d'Arrandes.

Some scraps of this and similar conversations reached the ears of Magnus.

"Gentlemen," he said, smiling, "don't be impatient. Everything comes to him who waits. To go into this country is nothing; to get out of it is everything. Magnus has sung many songs which began with a burst of laughter and ended with a *De Profundis*."

One morning he informed the dragoons that they had crossed the borders of Bohemia.

"So well that we are in the heart of the place," said M. de Collonges.

"You mean in the fire," said Carquefou, sadly.

"Now, gentlemen," continued Magnus, "I have but one suggestion to make to you. Remember that a single imprudence means the death of all of us."

"Quite short, but clearly said," answered M. de Berail, saluting him.

Rudiger, who knew Bohemia as a gardener knows his garden, from the fact that he had served under Count Thurn, was sent out as scout as soon as the troop reached the vicinity of Drachenfeld. At a glance one could see in him a man of the same race as Magnus, inured to all hardships and ready even to risk his head on the cast of a die.

The surprise of living in the company of men for whom honor and devotion were more than mere words was as great as was his desire to imitate them. He set out alone on foot. He wore a forester's jacket and a fox-skin cap. The dragoons laid their bivouac in a wood.

They waited for him to return until evening. Night fell and he had not yet returned. Renaud was beginning to suspect that Rudiger might have sold the secret of their expedition to Madame d'Igomer, when he reappeared. His head was low, his forehead care-stricken.

"What news?" asked Armand-Louis.

"The man of Ravensnest is at Drachenfeld," answered Rudiger.

"Mattheus Orlscoff?"

"He is in command of the castle."

"So much the better," cried Renaud. "This time I'll hang him."

At daybreak they resumed their march. Armand-Louis and Renaud, in unrecognizable disguise of beard and hair, rode at the head of the band. Rudiger retained his forester's dress. Magnus wore the costume of a charcoal-burner. Carquefou was disguised as a raftsmen. He carried a pole with an iron hook, and wore great boots. These three advanced on foot. At noon they beheld the towers of a castle rising above the crest of a hill.

"Drachenfeld!" Rudiger explained tranquilly.

These three syllables sent a chill through the veins of Armand-Louis and Renaud. Behind those formidable walls breathed Adrienne and Diana.

"Now, gentlemen," said Magnus, "the siege begins."

Then at a rather slow gait he made his way toward the postern of the castle.

Madame d'Igomer had returned to Drachenfeld the day after she had received Renaud in the pavilion at Nuremberg. From the first moment they looked at her on this occasion the two young ladies understood that something grave had occurred.

But they could learn nothing from her. With Mattheus, Thecla was more frank.

"Redouble your vigilance," she said to him. "The wolves know where the sheepfold is."

"Please God they'll come hither. My only fear is that they may find the road too difficult," replied Mattheus.

"One would say you did not know them," added Madame d'Igomer.

Meanwhile the days sped by and naught was discovered that might justify the belief of Madame d'Igomer. The scouts sent by Mattheus in every direction saw no man of suspicious appearance. Two or three of them had met the La Guerche squadron. But they were considered merely as adventurers.

They had spoken with some of the dragoons; but they

had not thought it worth while to inform the governor of the castle of their presence.

One morning a charcoal-burner appeared at the gate of the castle and asked to speak to the steward.

"In a valley, a short league from here," he explained, "there's a troop of cavalry which would like to breakfast here. They look like Poles or Spaniards, and seem to have a great appetite. They took all they could find in our cabins at a mouthful. I offered to go seek something for them to eat. They are going to join the army. You'll see whether 'tis worth the trouble to take them in. I saw a big round purse in the belt of the leader. The others have sabres and pistols. They swear they'll pay for everything."

The steward went to Mattheus. Mattheus ordered five or six lackeys to attend him and he rode out to find what sort of men these might be who were Poles passing for Spaniards. In the meantime Magnus took good care to lose himself in the castle. While wearing a stupid air, he ferreted into every corner. He saw many warriors, but neither Adrienne nor Diana.

The steward who had been looking everywhere for him found him lying on the rampart. At this the steward frowned.

"Sir," began Magnus, "I believed you had forgotten me. I've been beating about for an hour trying to find a way out. Show me to the door, please. There's no doubt but that the Spaniards will skin me alive if I don't bring them an answer."

"An answer!" cried the steward, giving him a shove, "they have it already. Begone, varlet!"

Magnus crossed the drawbridge lightly. He reached the bivouac just as Mattheus was leaving it.

To insure safety, M. de Berail had taken command in place of Armand-Louis. M. de Berail, who spoke Italian and Spanish fluently, gave out that he was the captain of a free company which was being sent from Milan to the army of Wallenstein.

Mattheus asked him some questions, less, perhaps, in fear of a surprise than by force of habit. M. de Berail

had an apt and easy answer for everything. He enjoyed the game.

"My entire troop is in need of rest," he said, finally. "If I were assured of meat for my men and fodder for their horses, I should like to remain here for a few days."

"You will have everything you need," replied Mattheus. "In return, if I should have need of some soldiers for work hereabouts, you will furnish them to me."

The governor and the captain separated, each enchanted with the other.

"He would have looked fine hanging from that dead branch," said Renaud as he watched Mattheus retire.

"Bah!" cried M. de Collonges. "The dead branch won't leave its place."

On the return of Magnus a council was held.

"The camp is assured for eight days at least," said M. de Berail. "That's a longer time than 'twill take to sack the place."

"Above all, if we make the attack to-night," said M. de Saint-Paer. "My sword is rusting in its scabbard."

"Thou who hast seen Drachenfeld," asked Armand-Louis of Magnus, "what dost thou think of it?"

"An attack is impossible. There is a garrison of two hundred men, not counting the lackeys. I saw nothing but cannons, falconets and blunderbusses. The moats are deep, the walls thick, the drawbridge provided with harrows. Lions must yield place to foxes. We shall be very wretched if we don't find a means of getting inside of the fortress."

"Is it not the same here as it was at Ravennest?" asked Carquefou, who pitched into a conversation whenever the mood was on him. "Don't you know of some accommodating underground path by which we could comfortably glide into the cellars of Drachenfeld? I should have an exceeding pleasure in surprising Lord Mattheus in bed again."

"Alas, no," answered Magnus, shaking his gray head. "There's neither a hole in the wall, a tunnel under the towers, nor a cave in the rocks. But since I got in there once, we'll all manage to do so."

While the dragoons consulted under the walls of the

stronghold, the Franciscan monk and Madame de Liffenbach, each in turn, left the two cousins no respite. Prayers and admonitions followed each other. Despite their patience and their good courage, their strength began to fail. They suffered fits of fever and hours of depression in which they fled from each other's presence. The thought that Armand-Louis and Renaud had forgotten them sometimes assailed their brain. They suffered horrible tortures. They repelled this thought, but it returned ever like those light and tenacious enemies who harass a good knight. Again, they might be dead. Tears followed to ease their anguish-torn hearts.

The prisoners of John of Werth and Count Pappenheim were meanwhile well remembered. These gentle swains sent them flowers and gilded fruits in silver baskets. With them the fair women should have riches, honors, pleasures, rank, consideration—in a word, all worldly goods that could be desired. If, on the contrary, the young ladies continued to repel them, solitude should be their dole until their bright youth should be extinguished by the icy austerities of the cloister. They must, therefore, have no illusions. To be sure, it was no longer a question of marrying them by surprise and against their will. The intervention of the Papal Legate had delivered them from this peril. But the Duke of Friedland having spoken after the legate, time was allowed to them to reflect. It was a kind of novitiate. They should not leave the castle, where a few pleasures were arranged for them, except to be buried in a convent. Inflexible as they were, they were their own executioners and could blame none but themselves for the lot which was reserved for them.

These discourses were served under all forms. The Franciscan monk gave them commentaries in a horrid voice. Madame de Liffenbach spoke with an air of authority. It was hoped that the two cousins would become wearied; that fatigue and disenchantment should lead them to a capitulation that would accomplish all the prayers of Madame d'Igomer. The latter's patient waiting was recompensed by the enduring pleasure of the moral suffering she was inflicting on the two captives.

The suspense, anxiety, the torment of knowing naught and fearing all, the daily persecution, the incertitude increasing day by day, the silence which gives access to chimeras, homesickness, imprisonment in a castle where everything speaks of what is hateful to one, monotonous days of threatening, pleasures offered by hated hands and to which they had to resign themselves in the midst of inimical faces, the imagination a prey to every wild dream and half maddened by the sweet daily exhortations, which produced on the irritated minds of the prisoners the cruel, intolerable sensation of a drop of water ceaselessly falling on the aching forehead of a sick person—all this was equal to the corporal barbarities which Mattheus had inflicted on Armand-Louis and Renaud.

The delicate, nervous woman proved herself the peer of the brutal and ferocious men. He aimed at the flesh; she at the heart.

"If Mademoiselle de Pardaillan and Mademoiselle de Souvigny should die now," Madame d'Igomer said, "it will not be my fault. I have not laid a hand on them nor have I allowed anyone else to do so."

The very day on which the squadron of Armand-Louis lay in bivouac under the cannons of the castle, Madame d'Igomer entered the apartment of the two cousins.

"Good news," she said gaily, "John of Werth is soon going to pay us a visit. He cannot live any longer without you, dear Adrienne. When Count Pappenheim learns that the Bavarian is here, I am sure that he will desert to fling himself at the feet of his beloved Diana. Make yourselves beautiful to receive them."

Adrienne and Diana at once made a resolve to wear only their simplest clothes. But when they awoke in the morning all their linen and woollens had disappeared. In their stead they had but to choose between silks, laces and velvets scattered in profusion about the room.

"Ah, my pretty coquettes," said Madame d'Igomer, clapping her hands when she saw them in their gorgeous attire, "you have not lost a minute!"

Touched by this example of feminine zeal, Madame d'Igomer confided to them that she proposed to celebrate

the arrival of John of Werth by magnificent entertainments.

"You will be the Queen of the Fetes," she said to Adrienne. Then turning toward Diana, she added soothingly: "Be not jealous, my dear Diana, your turn will come later."

CHAPTER XXII.

WHAT WOMAN WILLS.

A kind of intimacy had sprung up between the castle governed by Mattheus and the wood in which the dragons were encamped. Magnus profited of this to frequent the walls of Drachenfeld, whose every nook and cranny was soon familiar to him. He changed his guise more easily and quickly than a chameleon. Now a charcoal-burner, now a porter, he avoided all suspicion. On one occasion he yielded to the request of Armand-Louis and crossed the portcullis of the castle in company with his master disguised as a pilgrim.

At the stroke of one they saw a door at the end of a gallery open, whence appeared a little band which moved toward the chapel. It was raining that day and Madame d'Igomer felt a need of prayer. Behind the stiff and pompous Madame de Liffenbach came the two young ladies, wearing long veils of lace, embroidered with gold, which hid the elegance of their robes. But what a paleness marked their brows! They looked as two statues torn from the marble of a tomb. Picture Armand-Louis as he recognized Adrienne and Diana!

A cry almost broke from his lips. Magnus, who was kneeling at his side, seized his arm.

"Not a word, a stir," murmured the veteran, "or you will lose all."

Armand-Louis restrained himself, though he shook like a tree in a storm.

"Stretch out your hand," whispered Magnus, "are you not a pilgrim and should you not ask alms?"

The band passed close to them. The skirt of Adrienne swept the pilgrim's gown. Unable to master his emotions, Armand-Louis bore the rich waving stuff to his lips. Adrienne slackened her steps and letting fall a piece

of money into the hands of the unknown beggar, she said:

"Pray for me!"

The voice was so sad that the eyes of the Huguenot filled with tears.

"Bend low," murmured the ever-watchful Magnus, "here comes Lord Mattheus."

The knees of Armand-Louis remained nailed, as it were, to the floor, but when he stood up the flames of anger and daring flooded his countenance.

"I leave my heart in this place or I save her," he swore.

On the fourth morning after the arrival of the dragoons the trumpets sounded anew in the wood. A squadron of Croatians was passing. These troops had marched over the whole of Austria to gain the theatre of war. They halted to repose after the fatigues of their long travel. Some of the Huguenot gentlemen paid them a visit.

"Gentlemen, let us rejoice," said M. de Collonges, when he returned that evening, enchanted with his excursion. "We shall play a little before fighting. Everything went so well during our visit that we have had the good fortune to arrange four or five duels for to-morrow. This is the sowing of the seed."

"We'll reap the harvest," cried M. d'Aigrefeuille delightedly.

The promised duels took place at the rising of the sun in a glade at an equal distance from either camp. Two of the Croatians were killed and a third grievously wounded. M. de Voltras sustained a scratch on the arm.

By careful management the Croatian squadron might last fifteen days.

"Then we'll have to fast," said M. de Saint-Paer.

While the dragoons were beguiling their tedious sojourn in the wood, Magnus had discovered a young and pretty gypsy who came and went unmolested in the castle. She belonged to a tribe whose tents jutted from the foot of a hill not far from Drachenfeld. She seemed to be about sixteen years old. She was met at all hours on the postern path with her tambourine. It was rare that

some of the officers did not watch her as she issued from the gate.

Magnus persuaded a few women and lackeys into conversation. He learned that the gypsy frequently saw Adrienne and Diana, who seemed to feel a friendship for her. She danced and told them tales. One of the governor's lieutenants, Patricio Bempo, found her very much to his taste.

"Perhaps the road to the castle lies there," Magnus thought, scratching his ear. "If we get the gypsy, we will have Patricio Bempo, and if we get Patricio, we will have Drachenfeld."

In his turn by apparent accident he haunted the little savage, who smiled and showed her flawless white teeth whenever Patricio Bempo spoke to her. What surprised Magnus was that when the gypsy fixed her coal-black eyes upon himself, there was a significant something in her look which he could not understand. He fancied he had seen this face somewhere before now. But despite his efforts he could not remember where.

"I have seen so many faces, young and old, glad and sorrowful, pretty and ugly—a whole ocean of them," he said to himself.

One evening he found her alone on the edge of the forest, running like a fawn. He accosted her resolutely. She stopped suddenly.

"Will it please you, my child," he said, "to render a service to a gentleman who will be happy to pass a necklace of a hundred gold ducats about your pretty throat? Gold like this ring, which will fit your finger so well."

The gypsy did not even look at the ring which Magnus had just drawn from his pocket.

"In your turn," she replied, "will it please you to lead me to this gentleman? When I shall have seen him, perhaps I will be more disposed to perform whatever he may need of me."

Magnus hesitated.

"The Spanish camp is not far away," she added smiling. "Go thither, I follow you."

But she rather preceded than followed him. Magnus kept close to her, and studied her from the corner of his

eye. In the depths of his memory he recalled a face much resembling hers, as one sees, but does not grasp the traits of a countenance reflected in the water of a fountain. The gypsy hastened onward. She bounded like a deer through the forest. After a quarter of an hour, without having looked back once, she reached the camp, and standing upon a hillock, she cast an inquiring gaze over it.

"Why do you seek a cavalier you do not know?" Magnus asked her.

"Who has said I do not know him? Besides, you forget that I belong to a race that possesses the gift of second sight."

A group of dragoons stood at the edge of the camp. The gypsy went rapidly thither and approached a cavalier who was seated on the trunk of a fallen birch.

"Count of La Guerche," she asked quietly, "what can I do for you?"

Armand-Louis trembled. Magnus seized the gypsy by the arm.

"Thou knowest things," he murmured, "that it is not well to know."

"If you no longer remember Yerta," she continued, keeping her gaze upon Armand-Louis, and not seeking to free herself from the veteran's grasp, "Yerta has forgotten nothing."

"Yerta! 'Tis thou, little Yerta!" cried Armand-Louis.

"Myself! If you have passed close to me without recognizing me, my eyes and heart at once divined who you were."

"Then this is why I always saw this dark glance in spirit," said Magnus, releasing her, "but if you knew us so well why did you not discover yourself?"

"The Count of La Guerche wore a dress that did not belong to him. His disguise and yours might deceive all eyes except those of a gypsy. I thought that you did not wish to be known, and I acted as though I did not see you."

"A child with the heart of a man!" murmured Magnus.

"I have the heart of a woman who does not forget. If you have need of Yerta now, Yerta is yours."

She crossed her arms on her bosom and waited.

"Well, Yerta," cried Armand-Louis, "thou canst pay a hundred fold in one day what I did for you."

"Command; I obey."

"Thou enterest and leavest Drachenfeld Castle freely?"

"As freely as a bird flies in the forest."

"Thou must have seen two young ladies within there—two prisoners."

"I have seen them. One laughs sometimes, the other prays. Both are beautiful as morning."

"Yerta, thou must help me save them."

"The tongue speaks of two young ladies; but the heart thinks only of one. She is fair, with eyes bluer and sweeter than heaven, sadder than night. She prays much and her name is Adrienne."

"What! Thou knowest——"

"In your tent on the battlefield of Leipzig there hung a medallion between two swords. When I saw a woman at Drachenfeld, whose features resembled those painted on the medallion, I felt that some day you would come and that is why I waited."

"Good, Yerta!"

"She for whom you have risked a thousand deaths is not ungrateful. Had I not known it, I would have guessed it from her sadness. Alas, they whose hearts are captured are not gay."

A sigh swelled Yerta's bosom; then she glanced toward the wood, saying:

"Now that you are here, let me know what I must do and I will do it."

"Couldst thou not, if only for an hour, lead us into the castle?" asked Magnus. "Couldst thou manage to have the postern left open some evening? I think it is not always closed."

"Yes," answered Yerta, blushing, "sometimes a man comes out of there in the steps of a Tzigane, whose thoughts are elsewhere. He is in love, therefore he is blind. If I wish it, the postern will be left open."

"Then Adrienne is saved," cried Armand-Louis.

A shadow darkened Yerta's visage.

"There's a man I will deceive," continued the gypsy with an effort.

"Patricio Bempo?" suggested Magnus.

"Yes, Patricio Bempo. If blood must flow, you will save his life?"

"I swear it to thee," replied Armand-Louis.

"Take back this jewel," said Yerta, taking off the ring Magnus had slipped on her finger. "Between us there must be neither gold nor silver. I will see Patricio Bempo this evening."

"A word," cried Armand-Louis, retaining her as she withdrew. "If through thee I am to save Adrienne, and my life shall not be long enough to bless you for it, try to see her. Tell her that friends are near, and that she is to be ready to follow us when the hour of deliverance strikes."

Yerta seemed to reflect for a moment. She was no longer the girl Armand-Louis had seen, her face stained with blood, and pale and haggard as death. She was a woman now in all the glory of a wildflower beauty, proud and sad, a brow of rare intelligence, a glance of fire.

"Three days from now," she continued at length, "at the first hour of evening, be before the postern of the castle, behind the thick curtain of oak trees that stands there. I will have the key and a light burning in the highest window of the tower you see yonder toward the setting sun, will tell you that she whom you love sleeps not, but waits."

Yerta then dove in the wood, while the glances of Armand-Louis followed her steps. Soon the slight silhouette of the gypsy maiden disappeared, and they could no longer hear the sound of her tread on dead leaves. Two tears were silently coursing down her cheeks.

"Does this fair prisoner know how happy she is?" she said as though the words escaped her lips unwittingly.

Then lowering her head she hastened along the path which led to the castle.

A moment later she was to be seen in a gallery where Madame d'Igomer loved to assemble the people of the neighborhood, to whom her hospitable heart offered entertainment. Yerta sounded her tambourine and halted

before each group. But her eye, quick as a bird's, was seeking a certain face. Finally a door was opened and Adrienne appeared.

"Last always, and last to be best admired," said the baroness, advancing towards Adrienne.

But Yerta was before her, and placing her finger on the arm of the young woman, she said:

"The morning follows night. The nightingale sings after the storm. In your features I read that before a year shall have passed you will be wedded to a young and mighty lord, whom you love——"

"And who will soon be here, is it not so?" suggested Madame d'Igomer, who was thinking of John of Werth.

"Yes, he will be here soon. As you I know it, as you I see him."

Adrienne quickly withdrew her arm.

"Do you not wish me to tell you his name?" asked Yerta.

"Since fate protects you, let fate speak, my darling," said the baroness, who moved away after casting a significant glance upon the Tzigane.

Yerta had seized Adrienne's arm again.

"Armand-Louis!" she whispered.

Adrienne trembled from head to foot.

"They are watching us," continued the gypsy coolly, pretending to examine the lines in Adrienne's hand. "Do not tremble. Try to smile. I have seen him. He is near. He will deliver you. Be ready at the first signal. Leave your lamp lighted, and if at night you hear me sing, let your door remain open. Somebody will not be far away. For the present make Madame d'Igomer believe that you are resigned. You can well suffer a little for him who loves you so much."

Yerta let fall Adrienne's hand, and brushing her thumb against the sonorous skin of her tambourine, she softly sang:

"I love," says the silvery moon,
Bathing in cloudy fleece.

"I love," say the jaded flowers,
Dragged

By the careless brook.

The tambourine snorted while she shook its copper rings, and Yerta continued, as she threw a furtive glance on Patricio Bempo, who devoured her with his eyes:

"I love," said the wave to the moon,
Under the dune
On which mounts its mighty surge.
"I love," says the bird who clucks
Under the moss
Amid the yellow corn.

"Well?" asked Madame d'Igomer, as she dropped a gold coin into Yerta's hand.

"Well," replied Adrienne, "one must resign oneself to one's lot."

Madame d'Igomer kissed her brow.

Yerta had just disappeared; but she had not left the gallery alone. Patricio Bempo followed her. He saw her stop at the edge of a ditch and fling into it the piece of gold which the baroness had given her. As the glittering coin sank into the greenish water she rubbed her hands together in a convulsive movement of anger and disgust.

"Ah, the words I have just heard, the words your song repeats ever, will you always say them alone?" cried Patricio Bempo.

"And why should I say them," asked Yerta, looking at him fixedly, "to him who does nothing to merit them?"

"What have you demanded of me which permits you to speak thus? Have I not offered to do everything?"

"Yes; everything I did not wish to accept."

She moved away from the ramparts. Patricio walked beside her, ravished with her beauty.

"Command me, then," he cried.

"Words, mere words," interrupted Yerta. "Others have offered me gold, jewels, robes to make duchesses envious, in fine, all that the sword of a soldier can conquer. None has said to me, 'Here is my heart, my life. Let all perish, I am yours.'"

"Do you not know that I am all yours? That I——"

Yerta set her little finger over Patricio's mouth, and fixing her soft-flamed eyes upon him, added:

"No more promises! If I ask you two things, I wager you will refuse them to me."

"I? Speak," said the lieutenant of Mattheus, whose lips clung to that dainty hand.

"Two things. Only two. The key of the little door which pierces the foot of the ramparts——"

"Of the door whose charge is mine?"

"Moreover, the countersign, which permits entrance though ten sentinels, with musket in hand, were posted along the wall."

"The countersign also? But you ask me my life with it, my honor of a soldier!"

"Do you fear to trust me with them?" Yerta asked half closing her dark eyes.

"Everything is yours, Yerta, except this."

"What did I tell you? Let's speak no more of it. You are like the others. A sorry love that which can give nothing. Farewell, Patricio!"

Yerta took a few steps toward the forest. Patricio followed her still, but she took no notice of him.

"But why do you want this key and the countersign?" he asked.

"Why?" asked Yerta, slackening her pace. "I was dreaming. I fancied that with this key one might enter Drachenfeld, without being seen, at nightfall. The door open, with the countersign, one might pass unknown and unquestioned before the sentinels. In the morning one might escape as a bird from its nest, and my tribesfolk would not know that the gypsy maiden had deserted her tent."

"Yerta, is it true? You promise me?"

"I promise nothing. But like the swallow I come and go. A chance may lead me to the foot of the walls, a chance may cause me to seek the door. But why open it, when behind this impenetrable iron and wood there is hidden a captain prudent as a hare and suspicious as an eel? Ah, Patricio Bempo, you are like a fire that from afar blazes brilliantly. One runs toward it, and reaches it to find only ashes."

"Yerta," cried the conquered Patricio, "here's the key!"

"The key; 'tis well. But the countersign?"

Patricio heaved a great and violent sigh. Falling at the Tzigane's feet and hiding his head between her hands, he murmured:

"Dux et imperator!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE POSTERN OF DRACHENFELD.

On the morrow at evening's first sign, Armand-Louis, who in the depths of the forest never let his eyes wander from Drachenfeld, noticed a light as of a star, shining at the top of a stunted tower in which dwelt Adrienne.

"Look!" he said to Magnus.

"The gypsy maiden has lost no time," replied Magnus.

They notified Renaud of their discovery, and the dragoons were informed that they might have to strike camp during the night.

"So much the better," said M. de Collonges. "I am weary of killing Croatsians."

Shortly afterward, a band of Huguenots, at whose head were Armand-Louis, Renaud, Magnus, Carquefou and Rudiger, stole up to the edge of the wood. A little distance behind them a few of the dragoons held horses ready saddled and bridled. M. d'Aigrefeuille was in charge of the latter company. He had received orders to advance at the first noise or cry that should be raised.

The rest of the troop lay flat in the undergrowth, behind the hedge, so that they could see everything that passed without being seen themselves. Somewhat forward and protected by a knoll lay Armand-Louis and Renaud with their three servitors. The night was clear and calm.

Armand-Louis and Renaud had been at their post scarcely a quarter of an hour, when their ears caught the sound of light footsteps. A woman was passing

within a few yards of them. She wore a long cloak and was hurrying toward the castle.

"Yerta!" Magnus whispered to Armand-Louis.

The gypsy maiden vanished in the black shadow of the castle walls. Behind her followed Magnus and Carquefou, gliding like serpents toward the bank of the wood. Rudiger kept watch not far distant.

Lying quite near and holding breath, Armand-Louis and Renaud scanned the postern, which looked like a great round black spot on the base of the wall.

Here Yerta paused for a second, slipped the key into the hole and opened the little door.

Perhaps she was not going to close it when a sentinel advanced upon her.

"Dux!" she cried huskily.

"Et imperator!" replied the sentry.

Yerta pushed the door back on its iron hinges and entered into the vault.

Patricio Bempo had heard all, the furtive step of Yerta, the muffled groan of the door on its hinges, and the challenge and countersign.

"She! It is she!" he said.

Yerta was soon at the head of the spiral staircase which led to the apartment of Patricio. He leaped across the threshold, darted through the room and opened the window on the balcony.

Patricio was following her with outstretched arms. The Tzigane was horribly pale. Her glittering eyes scanned the sombre and silent forest, the glades, the moats, where vague forms were barely distinguishable. They looked like the fallen trunks of trees. In the stunted tower a lamp-flame trembled. She leaned over the balustrade. From the foot of the wall arose the sound of a piece of metal against a pebble.

"What is that?" asked Patricio.

"The gold bracelet I had on my arm has fallen," answered Yerta.

Patricio took her in his arms and tried to lead her within the room.

"No," murmured Yerta, holding him tenderly. "The air is good here."

Then she laid her head on Patricio's shoulder, and in a trembling voice began to sing:

"I love," says the black nightfly
To the breath
Which weeps in the reeds,
"I love," says the wave superb
To the bit of grass
That quivers in the depths of the waters.

The soft night breeze bore the sound of her voice through the air; the light still trembled behind the narrow window of the tower, and Yerta, whom Patricio gazed upon enraptured, continued her song:

"I love," says the wind that passes
Through space
Where glows the great sun.
"I love," says the autumn flower
Which shivers
At the kisses of the purple eve.

A shadow passed before the window where the solitary lamp shone, and the gravel crunched furtively at the foot of the wall.

"Some one walks below," whispered Patricio, leaning over the balcony.

"You hear the tread of a stag in the wood, and you no longer see Yerta who is at your side," murmured the gypsy.

Patricio felt the fire of a kiss upon his cheek, and trembling he seized her in his arms.

"Ah," she whispered, "it will no longer be said that I do not love."

Her cheeks were instantly flooded with tears.

Magnus meanwhile had slowly and noiselessly as a lizard approached the postern. He had picked up the key which Yerta had dropped from above, and slid into the hole. This done, Armand-Louis wished to pass in the first.

"No," said Magnus. "Let me go first. There may be a poignard behind this door, and the blow that strikes you will strike Mademoiselle de Souvigny as well."

"Dux!" cried a sentinel who suddenly appeared at the loophole.

"Et imperator!" replied Armand-Louis.

The sentry shouldered his musket, and they entered. A sentry was pacing up and down in the sombre hall, which was poorly lighted by a lamp hung from the roof. This one challenged them with the same word; the same reply was returned to him.

He had counted four men; at the fifth he frowned.

"Does the governor of the castle know you are here?" he asked.

The Pole nodded in assent and allowed his companions to enter.

The postern remained open.

"Comrade," said the sentinel as Magnus and his three companions passed into the vault, "do you not close the door?"

"Others are coming," replied Rudiger, who had quietly seated himself on a stone bench.

"More? Then if more come they must give the counter-sign. The door must not remain open."

"Then close it yourself."

The sentry approached and shoved it close; but the instant that he turned his back on Rudiger, the Pole leaped like a jaguar and planted his dirk between the shoulders of the sentinel. The latter's arms opened wide and he fell in a heap to the earth.

"One at least," muttered Rudiger, as he calmly wiped the blood-stained blade on the dead man's cloak.

Then he reseated himself on the bench after having opened the postern door.

Magnus, who was acquainted with the lay of the castle, swept through a long gallery which connected the two wings of the building. Thus he quickly led Armand-Louis and Renaud to the tower inhabited by Adrienne and Diana. Standing arm in arm, pale and trembling, they were awaiting their saviors.

At sight of the two gentlemen they sprang toward the passage which united the tower to the other buildings. Madame de Liffenbach appeared at the door.

She was about to scream, when Renaud, pointing a pistol at her head, muttered:

"Madame, a single word, and you die!"

Madame de Liffenbach grew pallid, attempted to advance a step and fell in a swoon.

"She may recover and cry the alarm before we get out of this cursed castle," murmured Carquefou, casting lynx glances from side to side.

"'Tis possible," said Magnus.

Then wrapping the duenna in the folds of a great cloak, he laid her in a closet, taking care to shut the door upon her.

Adrienne and Diana were in the arms of Armand-Louis and Renaud.

"No words, but wings," warned Magnus.

As they reached the door of the gallery the silhouette of a man, who walked with the supple tread of a cat, suddenly appeared at the farther end of this long apartment.

"Have a care, 'tis Mattheus Orlescopp!" Magnus murmured in the ear of Armand-Louis.

Though these words had been so swiftly and quickly said the little band had caught them.

With a lightning glance Magnus surveyed the gallery. Then he assisted the two young ladies behind a heavy curtain, whose folds concealed a bay window. Armand-Louis and Renaud stood beside them, pistols in hand. Magnus exchanged a glance with Carquefou, and these trusty fellows hid behind enormous pillars, which were covered with panoplies of arms.

All this was done with the rapidity and silence of the wind that blows. They had disappeared as so many phantoms. When Mattheus entered into the gallery all was mute under its lofty ceiling. An uncertain ray of the moon, broken by the panes of glass in the window, cast a confused light across this immense hall.

For an instant Mattheus paused on the threshold as though warned by some indefinable fear of the presence of an unseen danger. Then neither hearing nor seeing anything to cause him alarm he proceeded.

The rounds he made this evening were not his daily habit, though he was ever on the alert. But a certain

something, which it would have been very difficult for him to explain, a kind of suspicion, a vague and unthinking anxiety, had dragged him from his bed to run through the castle halls. The governor's inspection was awaited night and morning, and while waiting the soldiers watched.

His eyes questioned the stiff folds of arras and curtain, the window niches and corners lost in the night as his footfall fell lightly on the floor. When he reached the middle of the gallery the moon was veiled and a deeper shadow flooded the place. Mattheus still advanced.

He had made most of his way when he fancied he saw the bottom of a curtain move as though in a sigh of the night wind.

His hand sought the hilt of his dirk, but while all his attention was concentrated upon the suspect tapestry, Magnus and Carquefou suddenly leaped upon him and flung him to the floor before he could even unsheath.

"Help!" cried the governor in stifled tones.

But his voice was lost as a breath. A moment he lay, bound and gagged securely despite all his struggles, a rope about his neck, which Carquefou held. Mattheus Orlescopp, the terrible, was now no more than a lifeless lump, like a soldier's cadaver ready for burial.

Armand-Louis and Renaud stood before him, but he did not recognize them. Only the presence of Adrienne and Diana made him suspect the traits of these faces he could but indistinctly trace in the darkness.

"I told thee," said Renaud finally, "that I would hang thee; and thou well knowest I keep my promises."

Mattheus shivered. The veins of his throat swelled. From corpse-like pallor his face grew purple red. His whole body shook convulsively and his muscles struggled in a supreme effort. His eyes, into which the blood had spurted, closed and he remained motionless as death.

Renaud made a sign and Carquefou slung Mattheus across his shoulder. They passed through the gallery, reached the hall and proceeded silently through the postern. Rudiger, who was waiting for them, had seen or heard nothing.

"All's well!" he said to Magnus.

The moon lay hid behind great clouds. It was almost impossible for them to discern the black curtain of the forest, which lay drowned in the blackness of the night.

Suddenly a cry arose from the watch-tower hooked in the angle of the wall as an eyrie of an eagle on the side of a rock.

"Dux et imperator!" shouted Armand-Louis in answer to the challenge of the sentry.

Mattheus opened his eyes and closed them in the same instant.

A moment later the moat and escarpment had been cleared by this strange company.

CHAPTER XXIV.

REQUIESCAT IN PACE.

A few paces from the forest there was an old dead tree, which stretched its stout branches over a precipice at the border of a glade. Carquefou laid Mattheus on the ground and passed the end of the rope which he held over a branch of this tree. Magnus took part of the gag from the prisoner's mouth, who could now articulate a few sounds, but could not cry out. Then he placed between his pinioned hands a small wooden cross.

"Recommend thy soul to God," said Magnus. "Thine hour is come!"

"Damn ye!" mumbled Mattheus, throwing the cross from him, "John of Werth is not far away."

Carquefou pulled the rope and looked at Renaud. The prisoner's body was half raised from the ground.

"Oh, this is horrible! Not here, not before me!" cried Diana, clinging to the arm of Renaud.

"No, no," added Adrienne. "Have mercy on him. Should we think of punishment, in this hour when Providence restores our liberty to us?"

Renaud was about to answer.

"Adrienne is right," interrupted Diana, "he is a captive. He can do nothing against us. Have mercy on him."

The body of Mattheus was let fall again to earth by Carquefou.

"Yet this was a beautiful chance and a beautiful tree," grumbled Carquefou, as he knotted the rope solidly about the trunk of the dried tree.

Then he followed Magnus, who was running to the spot where M. d'Aigrefeuille was waiting with his dragoons.

Armand-Louis, Renaud, Adrienne and Diana had just disappeared in the depths of the forest.

Rudiger walked in their rear; a kind of pity had seized him as he gazed at the man who had been his master and whose face was pale with the awe of death.

He looked behind him once more and saw the governor writhing on the ground. Carquefou had not loosened entirely the rope about his neck; besides, a jerky movement might pitch him into the gorge which lay within ten feet of him.

Death lurked everywhere for Mattheus. Rudiger retraced his steps.

"Now I'm becoming tender," he told himself. "How stupid it is!"

Mattheus, hearing his steps, raised his head with an effort and looked at him.

"I'm suffocating," he groaned in a voice hardly human.

Rudiger knelt down and loosened the knot of the rope.

"If you have anything else to ask of me, make haste," he said.

"Don't leave me in this position," replied Mattheus. "The slant of the ground impels me toward the gorge. My head is low and the blood stops my breath."

He gasped even as he spoke.

Rudiger knelt down again, and taking Mattheus in his arms, he raised him to change his position. A devilish joy gleamed in the eyes of the prisoner. Seizing Rudiger's pistol, which, hanging in its belt, came even with his grasp, he pressed the barrel to the Pole's breast and fired.

Rudiger sprang back like a tiger struck with the ball of a hunter. He staggered a few steps and fell.

"Dead!" cried Magnus.

A musket shot from the castle answered this report.

"Ah, all's not lost!" murmured the governor, as he glared at Rudiger, stretched on the earth.

But the Pole, whom he thought dead, rose slowly on his hands and crawled toward him. Mattheus felt a cold sweat moisten the roots of his hair. Keeping one hand on his wound, whence the blood flowed in a torrent, Rudiger crept on and on; each effort brought him nearer to Mattheus. A grim, unconquerable determination

shone in his eyes. Soon he could touch the feet of Mattheus with his finger-tips and clung to them.

"I'll not die alone!" he groaned. "Wretch, 'tis thou who killed me, even as I was helping thee. Then, rat, I'll do for you what Renaud de Chaufontaine was too noble to do."

Then, stiffening his bloody hands he braced his chest against the feet of Mattheus and pushed him toward the abyss. Mattheus strove to repulse him, but his bonds prevented him, the blood froze in his veins and his most violent efforts were hurtling. He felt his body gradually slipping along the grass.

"Mercy, mercy," he groaned.

"Thou'lt have mercy and from me! Thou'rt joking, Mattheus. Wretch, thou'rt going to die and to die hanged."

With this Rudiger made an extra effort and Mattheus went nearer death. He dug up the tufts of grass by which he sought to save himself. Only a small stretch of verdure separated him now from the abyss. Suddenly Rudiger stopped; his exhausted arms scarcely bore him; he fell face downward to the earth.

"Ah, thou couldst not, robber," roared Mattheus.

Rudiger dragged himself slowly along and again laid his hands on the body of the governor.

"Listen," said Mattheus, his teeth chattering. "Die in peace. Release me and I'll have a thousand masses said for the repose of thy soul."

But the feeble hands of the dying Pole frantically shoved the governor on to the slope. A trail of blood marked his course.

"Thou'lt have a thousand gold ducats, ten thousand; all I've got, if thou'lt but spare me, hangman!"

The last words died in the throat of Mattheus. Rudiger, feeling the chill of death in his bones, shoved him onward with shoulder and arm, digging his feet in the soil to sustain his pressure. The abyss yawned slowly, but fatally, beneath the haggard eyes of the captive; he gasped an oath from his foaming mouth. Then a last shove of the Pole's shoulder sent him over, the rope

straightened out with a crack and the corpse of Mattheus hung above the gorge.

Rudiger leaned his head over the side of the precipice, while his life-blood ebbed away swiftly. He raised himself on his elbow by a supreme effort.

"He'll take thee, villain!" he groaned.

A veil sprang up before his eyes, a chill shook his whole body and his elbow fell from under him.

"Ah, mercy, good God, mercy!" he cried.

His head dropped heavily on the grass and he moved no more.

Meanwhile the double firing which had just broken the silence of the night had aroused Patricio Bempo. He sprang for his sword and leaped from the room, where Yerta listened with bended head like a wild-cat. The Italian crossed the gallery to attain the ramparts. He stopped at the sound of a stifled groan which proceeded from the depths of a room he was passing. He kicked the door in and a disheveled phantom, dragging a cloak, appeared before him.

"Down there, down there, they took them," said Madame de Liffenbach in a hoarse voice, as she pointed with her withered hand to an open door at the end of the gallery.

Patricio ran toward it. The alarm had been sounded and everywhere heavy footsteps echoed from the walls and ceilings of the castle. As the lieutenant was passing through one of the lower halls, at the end of which stood a spiral staircase, he felt a draft of fresh air strike his cheek. A dreadful suspicion crossed his mind and he plunged into the dark passage at the foot of this staircase, which led to the postern. He had advanced but thirty steps when he slipped in a pool of blood. He stopped and looked down and began to search. The body of a soldier lay against the wall; and the earth hereabouts was freshly marked with many footprints.

"To arms!" cried Patricio in terrible tones.

"To arms!" repeated the sentry in the watch-tower.

Ten trumpet calls replied and Patricio hastened back to his room to inform Yerta of what had happened. The hour of love had passed; the hour of battle had struck.

"Oh, Yerta," he cried as he entered the room, "what an awakening!"

But there was no answer. The gypsy had disappeared. The window was wide open and from the balcony to the ground hung a white sheet which indicated the flight of the fugitive. The water in the moat was still trembling under the rays of the moon and a vague shadow was fleeing into the forest.

In a mad rage Patricio Bempo seized a musket from the wall, set it against his shoulder and fired. The ball whistled through the air. The gypsy gave a great leap and vanished in the thick of the wood.

"I'll be avenged yet," roared Patricio as he flung the musket from him into the moat.

In the castle rumor and tumult reigned. Madame de Liffenbach had awakened Madame d'Igomer, who, half naked, rushed to the room of the two cousins, unable to believe that they had been taken.

"Both of them gone!" she cried, "Mademoiselle de Pardaillan and Mademoiselle de Souvigny! Then those two Huguenots must have got into the castle."

As she turned to leave, she met Patricio, who had just been to the room of Mattheus. He had not found him there and was seeking him out all through the castle.

"The governor is not in his room," Patricio said, "and nobody has seen him."

"To horse, then!" cried Madame d'Igomer, "and woe betide ye, if ye fetch not back the two women, bound hand and foot, as well as the wretches who have stolen them."

An instant later a troop of cavalry issued like a torrent from the gate of Drachenfeld and made the drawbridge tremble as they crossed it.

They saw traces of the vanishers in the earth moist with the dew. Patricio followed them up to the edge of the forest, where the great dead oak stretched its branches.

"Look," said one of his riders suddenly, taking hold of his arm and pointing to the body of Rudiger stretched on the edge of the gorge, over whose abysmal depths swung the body of Mattheus Orlescopp.

Meanwhile Armand-Louis and Renaud had not lost any time in reaching the glade where M. d'Aigrefeuille,

with his saddled steeds, was awaiting them. They were now advancing steadily, escorting Adrienne and Diana, when they heard from afar the pistol shot of Mattheus and the gunshot of the sentry to arouse the castle.

"Powder is beginning to sing now," said Magnus. "Forward, gentlemen!"

"At last," cried M. de Collonges, "and if the balls sing, we'll talk."

Shortly afterward a third shot was heard and almost immediately Yerta appeared.

"Are you content with what I've done?" she asked, laying her hand on the neck of Armand-Louis' horse. "Is my debt paid?"

"Yerta, dear Yerta!" cried Armand-Louis, seizing the gypsy's hands and kissing them.

A smile illuminated Yerta's dusky countenance; but the next instant she staggered and fell upon her knees. A long thread of purple flowed down her dress to the ground. Armand-Louis leaped from his horse and took her in his arms.

"Yerta!" he cried, "you must not die, you who have saved us all."

The gypsy pressed him close to her.

"Thank you," she murmured, shivering. "Ah, I had not hoped to die thus."

The words came to his ear like a breath of the wind.

"Here," she whispered, laying her head against the heart of the Huguenot, "I am happy here."

Her eyelids rose and fell; she smiled sweetly. Her arms, which she had clasped about his neck, unwound. It seemed to him that the dear weight of her frail form had grown heavier on his chest and knees. He leaned his lips toward Yerta's cheek.

"Dead," he said in a low voice.

He laid her on the ground. All the men raised their caps.

A rumbling noise, as of cavalry, reached their ears. Magnus turned cautiously toward the castle and said:

"We have not a minute to lose if we would not have all Drachenfeld's warriors on our hands."

"Shall we leave poor Yerta unburied?" asked Renaud.

"Assuredly no," cried Armand-Louis. "I should deem myself unworthy to look upon Mademoiselle de Souvigny, if I left the body of our saviour to be outraged."

"Quick to work, then!" replied Magnus, as he and Carquefou began vigorously to dig a grave. A line of the dragoons was ranged between them and the border-side of the forest.

The noise grew louder and the earth trembled under the hoof-beats of the horses who were galloping between the trees. Soon they saw the flames of torches which the foremost riders bore to light their course. At the head of the squadron rode Patricio Bempo and Madame d'Igomer. A few more leaps and their horses stood before the line of Huguenots, behind which Carquefou and Magnus were digging the grave.

Madame d'Igomer, astonished at the sight of this armed troop, approached M. d'Aigrefeuille, whose uniform bore the imperial colors, and asked him whether he had not seen two women fleeing through the forest.

"Two women?" repeated M. d'Aigrefeuille, caressing his beard.

"Was one of them fair with eyes like the sky?" asked M. de Saint-Paer.

"The other dark, with fiery eyes?" asked M. de Berail.

"I think that we must have met them," added M. de Collonges.

But before he had finished speaking Madame d'Igomer had caught sight of Adrienne and Diana on horse.

"Patricio," she cried, "there they are. We need search no longer. You stopped them, gentlemen? I thank you——"

She spurred her horse forward, but M. d'Aigrefeuille caught it by the bridle, saying:

"Do not trouble yourself, Madame. These young women have been placed under our protection and, not to displease you, however, they must remain with us."

"What?" cried Madame d'Igomer, paling. "You will not give them back to me?"

Renaud advanced, taking off his hat and not trying to disguise his voice, he said:

"No, madam. I will keep Mademoiselle de Pardaillan, and my friend will keep Mademoiselle de Souvigny."

"They, always they," shrieked Thecla, in the tones of a hyena. "And do you fancy I cannot take them from you by force?"

"Try," suggested Armand-Louis.

Madame d'Igomer turned toward Patricio and his band, before whom in serried ranks stood three hundred gentlemen who looked upon fighting as a pleasure. The men of Drachenfeld counted them at a glance and hung back.

"Cowards!" muttered Madame d'Igomer.

"My lord, the work is done," said Magnus, coming forward, hat in hand. "Yerta sleeps in peace."

"Then, gentlemen, we have no more to do here. Forward!" commanded Armand-Louis.

"What!" screamed Madame d'Igomer, who was riding up and down like a fury. "They go off and you do not stir, you who have swords in your hands! What sort of men are you, then?"

Patricio spurred his horse forward. A handful of soldiers followed him and they fell upon the first line of the dragoons.

But the skirmish was very short. The Imperialists wavered, four or five of them emptied their bows and Patricio retreated with a broken sword.

"Yerta said I must spare thee," said Magnus, as he wiped Baliverne on the mane of his horse. "But don't tempt me again."

Madame d'Igomer was now surrounded by a disordered band of cavaliers. A good half of them was ready to flee. All seemed lost, when a fanfare of trumpets resounded from the other extremity of the forest and a rider, whose silhouette appeared in the first streak of dawn, came galloping at top speed under the branches of the ancient oaks.

When he reached Madame d'Igomer, he saluted her and said:

"John of Werth follows me."

The fanfare of trumpets kept sounding meanwhile.

"Ah, John of Werth!" cried Thecla, the blood leaping

to her cheeks for joy. "Until we meet again, gentlemen!"

Then, without concerning herself more with Patricio and his men, she spurred her horse in the direction whence the trumpets sounded.

"Now the ball commences," said Magnus, touching M. de Collonges on the shoulder. "You will see what a dance there'll be when Baron John of Werth leads the violins."

This said, he tried the blade of his sword with his finger.

"My poor Shiverer," murmured Carquefou, whose religion it was to imitate Magnus, "more work for thee; more terrors for thy master."

Carquefou tried the blade of his weapon on his saddle.

The strong voice of Armand-Louis resounded once more, the squadron fell in line and rode from the bivouac in good order.

M. de Collonges, who did not feel at ease, whistled a hunting song.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE RETREAT OF THE DRAGOONS.

In truth John of Werth had just reached Drachenfeld, He had taken advantage of a cessation of hostilities to pay a visit to Madame d'Igomer. But in place of finding a new opportunity to press his suit with Adrienne at the castle, who, as he had been informed by the latest letters of the baroness, was beginning to show a more docile disposition, he met with the tumult and clamor incident to the evacuation of the fortress. As soon as the cause had been explained he dashed into the forest with his escort and had his buglers sound his approach. How Madame d'Igomer became aware of his presence has been told. She speedily joined him and together they set out on the tracks of the three hundred dragoons in all haste.

The name of Armand-Louis was sufficient stimulus for John of Werth. Another and such a check from this hated rival after so many former ones made him furious.

The sun shone in full splendor when the troop of the baron, enlarged by that which had fallen to the command of Patricio Bempo after the tragic death of Mattheus, came up with the squadron of Armand-Louis. The Huguenots, who expected this encounter, were drawn up in battle array at the gate of a village, whose every position they held and whose every street they had barricaded.

At sight of the first dust clouds which betokened the approach of the Imperialists, the dragoons leaped to saddle. John of Werth, who was at the head of his troop, rode around the village, but did not find a single spot unguarded. In a burst of rage he gave the command to attack the enemy.

He had about three hundred cavaliers of his own; the troop of Patricio numbered almost as many. Thus the Imperialists possessed the advantage of number; but the

Huguenots that of position. The chances of victory were therefore about equal.

The clarions of the Huguenots retorted to those of the Imperialists and the struggle began. John of Werth charged on the right; Patricio on the left. Both attacks were fast and furious; but such was the vigor of the defense that the shock of the assailants went no farther than the lines of the village.

Armand-Louis, aided by M. d'Aigrefeuille, met John of Werth; Renaud and M. de Berail repelled Patricio. Madame d'Igomer, sitting her saddle with the ease of a reiter, had taken a place on a small hill whence she could observe the action. Adrienne and Diana, sheltered under the porch of a church, awaited the issue of the combat. They were surrounded by four dragoons, lest by any chance one or more of the enemy should surprise their covert.

Soon a belt of smoke encircled the village, where the men fought like demons in the blood of the fallen. Horses neighed piteously and dropped to the ground; the sound of the muskets was an incessant crash; the clash of swords and cries of terror, rage and pain tore the air. A kind of sullen fury was evident in the Imperialists. A gallant intrepidity marked the fighting of the Huguenots. The younger men sang; M. de Collonges spared neither songs nor blows. Renaud revelled in the strife. It was long since he had had occasion to call upon his *St. Estocade* so valiantly.

Finally the ranks of Patricio weakened; one broke, then another, until an entire squadron was disarrayed. A cry of victory arose from the throats of the Huguenots; but John of Werth answered it with a desperate charge. Magnus was tired of seeing him lead the old companies in his command back and back again to make the attack and he determined to break his fury by a decisive blow. Taking with him M. de St. Paer and thirty dragoons, he went forth from the village by a remote side street, attained the field without being seen and fell like a torrent bursting its dikes upon the flank of the Imperialists.

At this juncture when his advance was sorely put by Armand-Louis, his flank massacred by Magnus, and his

chances further diminished by the scurrying of Patricio's cravens, John of Werth gave way.

"Raise your swords and down on them!" commanded Armand-Louis.

The Huguenots charged mightily and the Imperialists fell before them like a tree in the tempest. In the heart of the bloody struggle Magnus met Patricio.

"Again!" cried the veteran.

Patricio fell upon him without parley; Magnus parried, then thrust—and the bloody blade of Baliverne sank into the throat of the Italian, who fell back upon his horse. The beast shied and Patricio dropped heavily to the ground.

"I told thee," said Magnus, "not to lead me into temptation!"

Leaping over the corpse of the lieutenant he swung Baliverne right and left in the broken ranks of the vanquished.

Armand-Louis and M. de Berail pursued John of Werth with unremitting fury. M. de Berail had a better mount and so reached the baron first. Then the latter turned. For an instant both riders were hidden in a cloud of dust, in which only the gleam of their swords was visible. Then a rider appeared out of the cloud. It was John of Werth.

M. de Berail staggered and fell to earth. He was seen to raise himself to his knees and seize again his sword. Then he fell and lay still. His horse scurried off in terror and John of Werth galloped away. Armand-Louis had come up to the spot; but the terrible captain was lost in the crowd of fugitives.

"He still bears that sword-knot at his hilt," murmured the Huguenot.

Renaud, who was close behind him, felt his eyes grow dim at the sight of M. de Berail lying lifeless and livid on the ground. He crossed the dead man's arms on his breast, took up his sword and covered him with a cloak.

"He was my friend and brother in arms," he said; "may the soil of Germany lie lightly upon his brave heart."

M. de Berail was not the only dragoon who failed to respond to the roll-call. These were decently interred;



"Diana tore off the jewel and flung it far from her."—p. 151.

and the wounded were placed in the largest house of the village, where a document was left, informing the Imperialists that a considerable number of wounded Austrians and Bavarians would answer for the lot of these Frenchmen. Magnus then hurried preparations for departure. M. de Collonges was astounded at this haste.

"Sir," replied Magnus, "you do not know the man with whom we have to deal. He will be on our trail before to-night, like a wolf that has scented blood."

They left the village, around which lay a hundred dead or dying men, and rode rapidly northward. But in spite of this loss the squadron exhibited an almost joyous ardor, which seemed increased by the knowledge that perils threatened them from all sides. Some of their foes might rise up at any moment from any point of the horizon. The memories of classic antiquity commingled in their minds with the heroic memories of chivalry.

"Where are the Arabs? Where are the Saracens?" asked M. d'Aigrefeuille, who was thinking of the gloomy Templars wandering in the mournful solitudes of Palestine.

"Who will sing on our return the retreat of the three hundred as in the past old Xenophon sang the retreat of the ten thousand?" added M. de Saint-Paer.

And they all longed for another battle, almost before their blades were dry of the blood shed in the first.

Although they were by this time accustomed to the horrible perils and scenes of war, Adrienne and Diana felt profoundly touched at the thought of the sacrifices these brave men were making for them. They were as among brothers with these hardy dragoons, whose ranks knew but one heart and one will. Even those who had never seen them before panted for a risk to incur in the young ladies' behalf.

"We swore we would rescue you from the Philistines!" said the old Calvinists.

"God, the king and women!" cried the younger men, who had adopted Sweden as their country.

They rode the whole day unmolested. Towards evening they noticed a great cloud rolling from the south.

"Here comes a storm," said Magnus.

They gained a wood as night fell. This they entered, and proceeding in the midst of a profound silence reached a valley wherein they set their bivouac, after having barricaded the entrance to it.

"The cursed Imperialists will not attempt to attack us here," said Magnus, who had guided them hither.

"So much the worse," replied M. de Collanges. "We should kill a goodly number."

After resting a few hours they set out before dawn on their march, escorted at front and on their flank by light platoons.

"'Tis easy to go into a wood," thought Armand-Louis. "To get out of it is more difficult."

Magnus, to whom no path was unknown, guided them towards the left. At the first streak of day in the heavens they gained the border of the forest, whence they were in view of mounted sentries disposed on the plain.

Armand-Louis commanded his dragoons to leap from their saddles behind an elevation, while Magnus with Carquefou and M. de Collanges set out in three directions to inspect the environs. At sunrise they returned.

"I saw five musketeers toward the west," said Magnus.

"On the north side I counted four squadrons," said M. de Collanges.

"Below there, where we entered, there's a million sabres and muskets," said Carquefou. "The Shiverer is still quaking because of them."

"Then we're surrounded," said Armand-Louis.

Without further parley Magnus flung the bridle of his steed to Carquefou, and creeping on hands and knees he reached the hedge which bordered the confines of the forest. They awaited his return in silence. In half an hour he returned and leaped into his saddle.

"Well?" asked Armand-Louis.

"I have found a passage at the end of which are four hundred cavaliers with a handful of infantry," answered Magnus. "Half of them are asleep or playing cards. These people fancy we are still on the other side of the wood."

"Let's show them we are quite near," said Renaud.

"We'll ride over their stomachs before they have time to recognize us. What think ye, gentlemen?"

The dragoons all brandished their sabres in token of assent.

Armand-Louis placed Adrienne and Diana in the middle of a platoon, the command of which he gave to M. d'Aigrefeuille. Then riding at the head of the squadron he led his men quickly to the border of the forest. Here he paused for an instant to contemplate his companions, who chafed with impatience behind him. He raised his sword and cried:

"Forward! Gallop!"

The troop dashed ahead precipitately. Like an avalanche, a whirlwind, they rode down upon the sentries almost before they could fire their pistols. The squadrons reached the body of the company with swords aloft and cut it down. In vain did infantry and cavalry attempt to array themselves in line of battle. Only one squadron offered serious resistance, but it soon followed the others in rout under the fierce blades of the Huguenots.

The way was clear and one hundred bodies lay in the plain.

Armand-Louis looked for M. d'Aigrefeuille, who rode up to him and said proudly:

"You confided the young ladies to my care. Behold them here."

But ere he could take the valiant gentleman's hand, M. d'Aigrefeuille let fall his bridle and fell at the feet of Adrienne. At the beginning of the action a ball had entered his breast; yet he had remained steadfast to his duty till the end. The battle won, he died.

"Yesterday M. de Berail! To-day M. d'Aigrefeuille! How many shall yet fall?" murmured Armand-Louis sadly.

Then the retreat recommenced.

The living barrier through which they had just fought their way was part of a belt of soldiers that John of Werth had formed around the wood. After his previous defeat the baron gave hurried orders to the various detachments in the vicinity to join him or to follow the directions of his

couriers. He himself launched out in pursuit of the Huguenots at the head of a small band of tried men.

As soon as he saw Armand-Louis and his companions enter the wood he resolved to imprison them there, not daring to risk himself in the night. Then he took his stand at the head of the stoutest squadrons upon the road which the Huguenots should logically take in order to reach the Swedish cantonments. But the oblique march of Magnus foiled his plan, and it was only two hours after the French had left the wood that fugitives coming up with him informed John of Werth that the dragoons had escaped from the belt of steel within which he fancied he had caught them.

The baron collected his men and set forth on the track of the Huguenots, like the wolf scenting blood, to which Magnus had likened him. None dared speak to him. He galloped ahead of his troop, silent and pale, biting his moustache and tiring his hand with the fierce grip in which he held his sabre.

"Nothing stops; nothing catches them!" he muttered at times.

Animated with a like ardor, strengthened by the same hate, maddened by the same thirst for vengeance, Madame d'Igomer galloped at his side. She seemed to be made of steel. No effort fatigued her.

The desolate villages, the smoking ruins, the numerous squadrons they saw here and there notified the Huguenots that they were nearing the fields where the armies of Sweden and Germany floated their mutually hostile standards.

Toward evening, Magnus, who rode ever in advance, descried the fires of a bivouac across their path. He spurred his horse and soon recognized the encampment of a numerous body of Imperial cavalry, lying on either side of the highway. They could pass here only in the teeth of sabres and pistols.

To the right and left stretched plains and marshes broken up with streams. None could pass here without a guide. To wait meant to receive the attack of John of Werth, and to be caught between two fires.

Magnus returned and coldly explained their situation. A council of war assembled about Armand-Louis.

"Gentlemen," said he, "we have just five minutes to deliberate."

"That's four too many. Let's draw and down this rabble!" said Renaud.

"This rabble numbers three hundred men," objected Magnus. "Let each of you give his opinion."

"Half of us will remain on the ground, the other half will pass ahead," cried M. de Collonges.

"We have always time to adopt the plan of M. de Chaufontaine," said Armand-Louis. "But we may try another."

"Which?" asked M. de Saint-Paer.

"It is possible that John of Werth has not had the time to inform these cavaliers of all that has happened since our departure from Drachenfeld. This is even probable. We still wear our green belts, our Imperial cockades."

"Alas for that!" sighed M. de Collonges. "Further, we are in a territory where it is hardly to be supposed that any Swedes would dare to penetrate."

"That is true."

"We can present ourselves boldly to the captains of this cavalry, pretend we are Spaniards or Italians, according as they are Germans or Hungarians, and inquire of them the location of the cantonments occupied by the corps of General Pappenheim. If the ranks open, we pass; if the captains become too curious we unsheath."

"Well planned!" exclaimed M. d'Arrandes.

"If the opinion of M. de la Guerche is that of us all," said M. de Voltras, "let us advance straight upon the Imperials."

"Forward, then!" said Renaud.

"Sheath, therefore, and trot ahead," said Armand-Louis. Taking M. de Collonges aside, he added:

"You are, perhaps, the youngest of us, but none the less resolute. At the first sign of danger you will take ten well-mounted men and form around the young ladies. If I make a sign to you with my hand, dash onward for their lives!"

"If I do not pass 'twill be because I'm dead!" answered M. de Collonges.

A few hundred paces had been ridden and Armand-Louis and Magnus took the lead.

"Who goes there?" cried a sentry.

"Jesus and Mary!" answered Armand-Louis.

At the war-cry of the Imperial army an officer approached them.

"Who are you? Whence do you come?" demanded the cavalier, whom Armand-Louis determined by his accent must be a Walloon.

"We are part of a Spanish regiment with orders to join General Pappenheim," replied Armand-Louis in atrocious German. "We are forbidden to lose an hour though we leave half the squadron on the wayside. If you can tell us how we can reach this general most speedily we will be grateful to you."

Several other officers now came forward. One of them, who was acquainted with Spanish, questioned Armand-Louis in this tongue. Armand-Louis and Renaud, who spoke this language fluently, replied with cleverly dissimulated gratification.

While they were speaking they still rode on. The squadron followed in close ranks. M. de Collonges remained near the two young ladies, keeping a constant eye on Armand-Louis.

"Ah, you have two women with you!" said one of the captains.

"My wife and her sister," Armand-Louis replied undisturbed. "Donna Louisa-Fernanda de Colorado y Penafior and Donna Emmanuela-Dolores de Miranda y Castejo. They are to await the termination of the war at the court of His Highness the Elector of Bavaria."

He said this in a calm, natural voice. Adrienne and Diana, who had listened in amazement, bowed to the Walloon officers. The latter all saluted in return. They were now almost at the limits of the encampment.

An idea suddenly illumined Renaud's brain.

"Dear captain," he said lightly, addressing his neighbor. "My horse is rather fagged. Had I the time to leave him stabled for a day or two, I would not part with

him for anything under the sun. But, as you know, I must hurry. Give me yours, which seems fresh and stalwart and you will have in exchange besides mine own ten gold ducats."

"So be it," said the captain, "I am happy to be able to oblige a comrade."

The deal was made, and this example followed by a large number of the dragoons, who had fagged or foundered steeds. Exchanges were proposed on the spot and were the more readily effected by the ingenious expedient of some pieces of gold.

Walloons and Huguenots separated a quarter of an hour later, each equally pleased with the other. The former believed that in two or three days they should have good were the more readily effected by the ingenious expedient horses. Provisionally they had a few bright ducats in pocket. The latter, spurring their vigorous mounts into leaps and curvets, felt quite assured that they had driven an excellent bargain.

One or two hours later Baron John of Werth entered the Imperial camp. His astonishment at finding no trace of battle, no dead or wounded in the route which Armand-Louis and his men had followed, knew no bounds.

Certainly the fugitives had necessarily met the Walloons. Yet they had no wings, he thought.

Before ten minutes had elapsed he knew what had passed.

"And you have been their dupes!" he roared. "They Spaniards from Milan! They soldiers for the corps of Pappenheim! Good God! They're Huguenots! Frenchmen!"

A cry of rage replied to him. Five hundred of the best cavaliers were at once placed at the disposal of John of Werth. They sent couriers in every direction to trace the path of the eternally elusive fugitives.

This was not easy, as the country was marked with the tread of countless squadrons passing hither and thither. Further, it will be remembered that the Huguenots wore the Imperial cockade and their guide was a man who knew the country perfectly and who was acquainted with

all the ruses of war. The band glided across the fields as a pike through the troubled waters of a stream.

At last such information was brought to John of Werth as enabled him to decide what course he should take. Madame d'Igomer displayed even more irritation and impatience than he, and it was on her insistence that they did not pause in their march when night overtook them.

At daybreak they learned from their couriers, who were scouting on all sides, in what location Armand-Louis and his companions were situated. They counted upon gaining upon them at about evening.

"The Huguenots are in front of you," said John of Werth, turning to his men, "will you suffer them to return to their country and tell how they vanquished the Imperialists on twenty fields?"

A terrible huzza and the unsheathing of a thousand sabres were his answer.

"Then, death to the French!" and the pursuit recommenced.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE FLAG OF TRUCE.

Good as a horse may be he cannot run forever. The steeds of the Huguenots had covered a dozen leagues without a stop. A halt was now imperative. Armand-Louis chose a village at the entrance to a valley, on either side of which lay an impenetrable morass. A flank attack was thus impossible. On the other side of the village was a thick wood, in which no cavalry could be marshalled. If the enemy wished to force its way therefore there was but one point for assault, the face of the village.

To render this spot less vulnerable Armand-Louis caused a dozen great oaks to be felled and stretched across the road and embattled the cottages which overlooked it.

"Now we shall be quiet, at least for the night," he said. "For to-morrow let's trust in God."

The horses were unbridled, and while they were taking fodder the Huguenots sought to make themselves comfortable here and there in the village.

As soon as the villagers caught sight of the cavalry in the Imperial uniform they were struck with terror of being plundered. They secreted all their goods and cattle and withdrew in hiding. Not a living being was to be seen.

"The houses still stand," said Magnus. "The place must be inhabited."

He set out upon a hunt and entered an inn. The host swore by all the gods amid quaking that he had not a ham hung on his roof, not a bottle of wine in his cellar.

"The Saxons, who visited us yesterday, gulped everything," he added.

But the Huguenots were not content with this explanation. The host was fat and sleek. They rummaged the

place and that so carefully that they found bread, cheese and beer. Carquefou made a sally upon the fowl that so imprudently displayed their beaks in the barn. He carried off a couple of dozen. Magnus discovered three mut-ton and two calves hidden in the depth of the cellar. Shortly a half dozen pigs declared their existence by their stupid squealing. But they did not squeal long.

"Now we have something to live on," said M. de Collonges.

A few of the village women, who were the first to venture from their huts, wept and lamented the theft of the fowl and meat.

Armand-Louis made a sign to Magnus, who pulled out his long purse and generously reimbursed these poor folk. Their astonishment at this liberality quickly dried their tears. They had not been beaten and had received money. This was unprecedented in their memory since the beginning of the war.

Sentries were distributed on every side.

At midnight all the dragoons, save eight or nine, slept tranquilly. A shot, echoing from one end of the village, startled the troop from its slumber. Each man rushed to the post to which Armand-Louis had previously assigned him. The alarm had been given by one of the sentries.

Far off in the darkness a cohort of cavalry could be dimly seen.

A low rumble of horses' neighing and the distant clash of arms reached the village. A company of musketeers drew near stealthily. Then a volley of balls leaped into the barricade of trees shaving off the twigs and bark.

"That's John of Werth," said Magnus.

"Fire low!"

The dragoons returned the fire. A dozen men and horses dropped to earth. The company, suddenly dismayed, retreated in disarray. Then silence reigned again.

M. de Collonges went outside of the village to reconnoitre. In an hour he returned with the information that the road was occupied by a body of troops.

"If by to-morrow we have not ten thousand devils with green belts on our hands," he added, "I shall be much surprised."

"'Tis not the attack that concerns me," replied Magnus. "'Tis the retreat."

He glanced at Armand-Louis as he said this and continued:

"Yes, yes, the assault will be repelled and John of Werth, hell take him, will leave a goodly number of his men stretched before our barricade. But if we leave the village we'll meet the Bavarians on open ground less than an hour on the other side of the forest, and we shall be one against ten."

"Zounds! What do we risk?" added M. de Saint Paer. "They'll not take us alive!"

"True; but are we alone?" murmured Armand-Louis, turning his gaze upon the house in which Adrienne and Diana had sought shelter.

"Curse the beggarly Germans!" exclaimed M. de Voltras.

"Perhaps we have another means to hold the enemy in check," suggested Magnus.

"We can pile up brushwood about the wooden walls and thatched roofs of these cottages and easily fire the whole place. Neither John of Werth nor his cavalry will pass through that furnace and we can meanwhile beat a retreat."

"Good!" cried M. de Collonges.

"But there are over a hundred families in the village. How many women and children will be without home or bread to-morrow!"

All about Magnus were silent. Each understood that the squadron was at the most difficult pass it had yet encountered.

M. de Collonges stretched his cloak on a bundle of straw and lay down.

"Let business wait till the morrow," he grumbled. "I'm going to sleep."

Carquefou, who never lost a word of Magnus' utterances, slept with one eye open. He did not hold the same opinion as his veteran comrade on the question of burning the village and believed that grave maladies demand heroic remedies.

"Faith," he thought to himself, "if a spark should ac-

cidentally catch a cottage thatch they would not hang me for it."

But first he must know whether the road through the forest was free. Tormented by these thoughts Carquefou rose before dawn, and, like a beast in search of prey, he slipped out of the village on the side opposite to the one attacked. There were great clusters of pines. Then leaving the road he followed the wood-path in the depth of which he could barely distinguish the traces of foresters. A horseman would have found it difficult to pass here. A quarter of an hour after he had left the last house in the village he noticed a flame in the middle of the road. Carquefou fell upon his stomach and crept along on all fours. Two more fires appeared on the road, one at the right, the other at the left. Shadows passed before the flames methodically. He fancied he could distinguish muskets on the shoulders of these shadows.

"Ha! Now it's going to be spoiled!" thought Carquefou.

He crept on a bit, then lifting his head in a bush, whose branches he separated with both hands, he counted about twenty flames scattered along the wood. Soon the slow and regular tread of a troop on march struck his ears. He leaned forward under the lower branches of the bush, held his breath and waited.

A patrol of infantry, commanded by a sergeant, passed quite close to him. Carquefou counted twelve men bearing muskets.

"I might easily finish two or three," he thought, "but then?—I fancy by that time the others would have rather battered me."

The result of this reflection was that he quickly turned his heels to the Imperialists and returned to the village noiselessly.

"Cavalry before us and infantry behind! 'Tis done perfectly," murmured Carquefou, still pressing onward.

He met Magnus, who was making his rounds.

"Let us be humane," he told him. "The fire will be useful," and he detailed to the veteran what he had seen. Then he added: "Yesterday M. de la Guerche spoke of

Providence. Zounds, but Providence would be welcome in the guise of a good Swedish regiment."

A volley of musketry interrupted them.

"There," said Magnus, "John of Werth wants to talk with us."

"Let's talk, then," sighed Carquefou.

But while Armand-Louis rushed toward the threatened quarter, Magnus took Renaud aside and related to him what he had learned from Carquefou.

"We must divide into two bands. In a little while you will have plenty to do on the forest side. If we remember only the cavalry of John of Werth, his infantry will soon have smoked us out like rats."

M. de Voltras and M. de Saint-Paer followed Renaud; M. de Collonges joined Armand-Louis. Thirty dragoons were left under the orders of M. d'Arrandes to be led with all speed toward the point most fiercely attacked. Soon the fusillade resumed from all points. The people of the village, terrified, took refuge in a poor chapel. Adrienne and Diana fell to their knees on the threshold of their house.

While they raised their voices to God in prayer, the musket balls rained on the roof and bounded against the walls of the houses in the village like hail in a storm. The roar of musketry continued unceasingly, interrupted occasionally by shouts and cries, which announced a death-dealing stroke, now on one side, now on the other. The whole village was overcast with a cloud of smoke.

The greater number of John of Werth's cavaliers had leaped from their saddles and were striving to scale the barricade erected by the Huguenots. Axes, hooks, pikes were brought into requisition against this obstacle which resembled a gigantic chevaux-de-frise. But the dragoons, ambushed in every nook, beat back the assailants as fast as they advanced. The French were entrenched behind the trunks of trees and spans of wall, which partially protected them from the fire of the enemy and permitted them to make every shot tell. At times they allowed a small body of soldiers to reach as far as the first line of houses, then they leaped upon the Imperialists, who had

become almost confident of victory, and not a man of them but fell.

Yet no backset diminished the fury of the foes, who were rallied by John of Werth, galloping hither and thither, sword in hand and cuirass on his back.

While Armand-Louis held his position, at the other end of the village Renaud withstood the assault of the infantry.

There had been no time to build a barricade here, but the village confines were protected by a small river crossed by a log bridge. All the fighting was concentrated at this bridge. A very rain of bullets did not deter a few lansquenets and musketeers from crossing the single arch, but as soon as they showed themselves on the opposite bank, Renaud, followed by M. de Voltras and M. de Saint Paer charged upon them and drove them back into the river, where some drowned.

On returning from such a charge Carquefou would wipe the Shiverer, saying:

"Some of them get bullets, the others water. It is a matter of taste."

Toward noon a parley-bearer, preceded by a trumpeter, who bore a white flag, appeared on the side which John of Werth commanded in person. The firing was at once stopped and Armand-Louis received the truce-bearer, whose eyes Magnus had already bound.

"Speak, sir," Armand-Louis said to him, after they had retired to the lower room of a house near by.

"I am sent to you by Baron John of Werth, general of the troops of His Highness, the Elector of Bavaria, my master, to request you to cease a futile resistance and to treat of conditions in order to stop the shedding of blood."

"In that case, sir, allow me to inform my companions in arms. Nothing of what is to pass here shall be concealed from them."

Armand-Louis addressed a few words to Magnus, who went out; then turning to the envoy of John of Werth, he added:

"You seem to be surprised, sir, that I should summon

all the men, with whom you have just been fighting, to this interview?"

"I have admired the valor of them all," gallantly answered the officer. "But, I admit, that I did not think the presence of so many dragoons was necessary to our deliberations. I believed I was speaking to their commander."

"'Tis true, I ride at their head. This is their free choice, confirmed by a commission of King Gustavus Adolphus. Yet I am less their commander than their friend. They would obey my orders without question, but I hold it in my honor to consult with them."

Renaud, M. de Voltras, M. de Saint Paer, M. de Collonges, M. d'Arrandes and other gentlemen now entered, preceded by Magnus. They ranged around Armand-Louis.

"Gentlemen," said their chief, "here is an officer sent by our neighbor, Baron John of Werth, to treat a proposal for capitulation."

"What!" cried Renaud, "have we only the hilts of our swords left? Are we out of powder and balls?"

"I swear to you, sir," added M. de Collonges, "that the most of us is still alive, feel us and see?"

"It is precisely to save your lordships the trouble of dying," responded the officer, saluting courteously, "that Baron John of Werth sends me hither. His conditions are such that you can accept them without dishonor."

"After all, it shall not be said that you undertook this inconvenience for nothing," returned Renaud.

"Sir, we harken to you."

"As soon as the village be surrendered and occupied by our men, you will have full liberty to retreat whithersoever it please you."

"Without ransom and with the right to return to the camp of the King of Sweden?" asked Renaud.

"All roads lay open to you, and you will pay no ransom."

"Proceed, sir."

"The honors of war will be allowed you and you will retain your arms and horses."

"Our standards also?"

"Your standards also."

"Ha! Ha!" laughed M. de Collonges. "This begins to resemble a fairy tale most marvelously."

"If I may believe my ears," said M. de Saint Paer, "all we have to do is to proceed on our way with blowing trumpets. Why did you not speak sooner? For the last three or four hours this has been our only desire."

"Perchance there may be a final little condition which you have not yet mentioned?" suggested Renaud.

"It is true, gentlemen, there is a final condition with which I have still to acquaint you. Yet remember well before you refuse it that all egress from this village is blocked."

"Here's a bit of advice that bodes little good," murmured M. de Collonges.

"You have with you two persons of quality, Made-moiselle de Souvigny and Mademoiselle de Par-daillan. They shall be restored to His Eminence, Baron John of Werth, who will conduct them to the Duke of Friedland, from whom, as you well know, they have been violently abducted."

"In a word," said M. de Saint Paer, with a tinge of disdain, "you propose that we deliver to you two women, who, besides us, have no friends or protectors?"

"Though the lot which the friends of whom you speak reserves for them may be exceedingly brilliant," continued the envoy, "that which awaits them at the courts of Munich and Vienna will leave them no room for regret."

"You call these conditions one may accept without dishonor?" cried M. de Collonges. "To sell defenseless women!"

"Bravo!" commented Renaud, grasping his hand.

Renaud's face at the same time turned scarlet with rage. He was about to speak, but Armand-Louis restrained him by a sign. Then turning to the Bavarian officer the Huguenot announced that the conference was at an end.

"We must deliberate," he told him, "will you please to withdraw? You will have an answer within a quarter of an hour."

"Deliberate!" cried M. de Saint Paer, when the dragoons were alone. "Deliberate, and to what end, pray?"

"Because there is involved a matter of personal interest

to M. de Chaufontaine and to myself," replied Armand-Louis. "I should consider myself dishonored if I did not inform you of the consequences of the resolution inspired by your magnanimity. On this matter I believe that M. de Chaufontaine holds the same opinion as I."

"Most surely," said Renaud.

"We are hemmed in on all sides," continued Armand-Louis, "by a superior force, which is being continually augmented by reinforcements, while steel and lead decimate our ranks. If you refuse the offer of John of Werth, some day we shall be caught in our entrenchments. You know what we may then expect."

"Death, of course," said M. de Saint Paer, quietly.

"Well, we have no great reason to be terribly frightened by such a thing!" exclaimed M. de Voltras.

"To die with sword in hand, is this not the best end a gentleman can wish for?" added M. de Collonges.

"Besides, who can tell," continued M. d'Arrandes, "how many there are condemned to death who live for a long time."

"There is no need to say, 'who knows,'" Armand-Louis interposed with vigor, "we have all been long accustomed to war and no peril frightens us. Come hither, Magnus, and tell us what thou thinkest of our position. Dost thou believe that the most tenacious courage can by any desperate chance secure our salvation?"

"No," replied Magnus, gravely. "I am speaking to soldiers. They know how to hear the truth. Only God's hand can draw us out of this pass. If then you wish to persevere in your resistance till the end, make the sacrifice of your lives. At your last hour you can all unite in a close column, leave the wounded to the mercy of the conqueror and fall upon the enemy. This is the supreme chance which the fate of war reserves for men of heart. Few of you will relate the episodes of this bloody strife to your nephews. Outside of this there is nothing."

"You hear, gentlemen," replied Armand-Louis. "Death is everywhere, yet you can avoid it."

"But you?" cried M. de Collonges.

"Oh, Renaud and I," answered Armand-Louis, taking his friend's hand, "are bound by a promise which cannot

be blotted out by the shedding of every drop of our blood. We will return with Mademoiselle de Souvigny and Mademoiselle de Pardaillan or we will not return at all."

"Then, count," said M. de Collonges, "insist no more. Your lot shall be ours. I believe I interpret the feeling of all my companions when I speak thus. When we set out for Drachenfeld you did not conceal from us the dangers of our way. The hour of real peril has struck. We are all ready for it."

"Yes! Yes! All of us!" was cried from all sides.

"Then, gentlemen, the propositions of John of Werth, which mean liberty and life to you, are declined?"

"They are!"

"Go," said Armand-Louis, turning to Magnus, "and have the envoy reconducted hither."

When the Bavarian officer returned he found the Huguenots pressing about their leader, clasping his hands and embracing him. A chivalrous enthusiasm glowed in every visage.

"Our deliberation is done, sir," Armand-Louis began. "I promised you should have your reply within a quarter of an hour. Here it is: Tell John of Werth that we intend to fight while a drop of blood flows in our veins."

"This is a sublime madness," the officer answered, casting a glance over the assembly. "I admire you. If Sweden can count many such soldiers as you, she will never be conquered."

The set faces which surrounded him told him plainly how useless it would be to insist on the purpose of his mission. He allowed Magnus to bind his eyes and to lead him out of the village, where the trumpeter with the white flag awaited him.

"Now, gentlemen," cried Armand-Louis, "to our posts. Let those who separate say farewell, for they may not meet again."

All brows were uncovered and these valiant warriors exchanged fraternal embraces in ominous silence.

"We are ready," cried M. de Collonges, who was pale with emotion, as he drew his sword the first of all.

A moment afterward the firing recommenced at both extremities of the village.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE CANNON'S ROAR.

While these combats, followed by parleys, which were soon interrupted by new battles, were taking place at either side of their asylum, Adrienne and Diana were waiting and praying in the house which Armand-Louis had chosen as most secure. Here the two cousins had found a game-warden, who was watching a child in fever. At sight of them he stood up and looked at them with eyes full of desperation and sombre fire.

"I had two sons and a daughter," he said to them. "The two boys fell before the blows of the Swedes in defending their father's faith. The girl was seduced by the new doctrines and she has strayed from the bosom of Holy Mother Church. God has avenged himself. She died by an unknown malady. Of all that I loved only this child remains to me, and his life is threatened. I hate you because you are of Huguenot blood, but you are being persecuted and are in danger. Therefore come in."

He sat down at the child's bedside, his face glowering with fanatic hate.

Adrienne drew near the little invalid and took his hand. The child looked at her and did not withdraw his hand.

"God is good to those who pray out of a faithful heart," she said. "Hope!"

In the days when she was at the Grande-Fortelle Adrienne had often had occasion to tend the sick, either of the people of the house or those in the neighborhood. She knew the virtues of certain plants and used them efficaciously. Toward evening her sweetness and kind manner had won for her the child's heart; he wished her to remain by him and felt his pain assuaged when she caressed him.

Certain now of being heard and obeyed, she prepared a brew of the juice of some herbs gathered in the garden and offered it to him.

The game-warden stretched forth his hand as if to take the vessel which contained the potion.

"No," interposed the child, "this woman is good to me."

Then raising the cup to his lips he drank the draught.

That evening he slept peacefully; a copious sweat exuded from his pores and at daybreak he was breathing like one just brought to life. His first glance caught Adrienne, who was leaning against the bed.

"I dreamed that my mother kissed me last night," he said, stretching his arms to her. "She looked like you."

The game-warden stood up much perturbed. Adrienne looked at him sweetly, saying, in a low voice:

"Perhaps God will deign to save him."

The child fell asleep again, holding her hand.

It was at this time that the envoy of John of Werth entered the village. The roar of battle resounded even until nightfall. At times a spent ball would flatten against the roof of the house. Every little while Diana went to the door to look without. To the right or left, whichever way she gazed, she saw but two great clouds of smoke streaked with flame. Then a few of the men would come by, bearing on a litter some poor wounded fellow. After having laid their burden in a shed or a barn they returned in all haste to the strife.

"Farewell!" murmured the wounded one to his departing comrades.

"Farewell," was the melancholy response.

Then Adrienne and Diana left their shelter and ran to render aid and consolation to the fallen. At times all they had need to offer was their prayers.

Night fell and put a stop to the attacks of the Imperialists. Despite twenty assaults they had not succeeded in breaking the barriers or dislodging the Huguenots from the outermost houses or the gardens which belted the village. Both sides suffered the loss of a goodly number of men. Several times the enemy had gained so great an advance that M. de Voltras had to run at the head of the reserve to protect the points in danger.

Armand-Louis inspected his ranks; on all sides he

found the same resolution and intrepidity ; but neither M. d'Arrandes nor any of his companions now said :

"Who knows?"

"We can calculate how many days we have to live," cried M. de Collonges good humoredly, "by a rule of proportion. If in twenty-four hours we lose thirty men, how many days will suffice in which to destroy those still standing?"

"I don't know arithmetic," answered M. de Saint-Paer, smiling.

Nevertheless there was but little talk as the night-watches drew near; the youngest and maddest heads found themselves in serious meditation. They thought of their distant fatherland, of those they loved, whose voices they should hear nevermore. A few furtive tears bedewed blond moustache; then the refrain of a song troubled the impressive silence of the night.

Magnus, indefatigable even after the battle, searched the marshes which surrounded the village to discover a passage. On all sides the muddy bottomed water stretched out in pathless waste.

Returning from this excursion he went to the quarters of Armand-Louis.

"God is master!" he said, shaking his head disconsolately.

Renaud alone preserved a semblance of hope. As soon as the last shot had been fired he hurried to Diana's presence and here forgot everything. When she recalled their situation to him, he smiled.

"By St. Estocade, my patroness," he cried, "do you think that I have come all the way from La Rochelle to die in Germany? Erase that from your diary, if you please."

Nevertheless, at the first streak of dawn the Marquis of Chaufontaine reappeared at his post and did not leave it again.

He was on the valley side, as Armand-Louis was on the plain side, on the day after that which saw John of Werth's envoy return with his propositions spurned. To-day, to the great astonishment of the French, morning broke without the crack of musketry.

"They are reserving their music to salute the sun," said Renaud.

The sun rose and they heard nothing. An hour passed; then another; the same ominous silence surrounded the village.

Magnus and Carquefou became impatient. Taking separate routes, both of them stole out of the village. The sentries of the enemy were at their posts; the men in their ranks.

John of Werth was riding up and down, inspecting earthworks that were being put up with superhuman effort, while places were being measured off by the officers. The baron was pointing out his plans with his cane to Madame d'Igomer, who appeared to approve of them.

"Here's something that augurs no good for us," thought Magnus.

A white rocket shot out from the plain side, a red one answered it from the valley.

Magnus returned to quarters, where Armand-Louis was awaiting his report. Here he met Carquefou, who detailed information identical with his own. At either end of the village the same works was being pursued and the same calm was remarkable.

"Perhaps they're going to starve us out," said M. de Collonges.

"Gentlemen," said Renaud, "if battle makes holiday, there is no reason why our breakfast should do likewise."

In this lay the thorny aspect of the question for Carquefou. What he had been able to discover on the day of their arrival in the village, had given him but a poor opinion of its culinary resources. All that they had found had been eaten; and he was at a loss to invent a means for replacing what no longer existed. But a kind of miracle had been wrought in the village. At the first few steps of certain dragoons, whose appetite awoke early, they were agreeably surprised by the sight of numerous companies of fowl which issued from various cellars. A herd of honest sheep and inoffensive calves, having been restored to daylight, were running along in the chase of

shepherds. Cellars and black holes gave up their prisoners.

"'Tis the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes," murmured Carquefou. "Blessed be the Lord!"

This miracle was the result of Magnus' execution of his master's commands. All their provisions being eaten, he had made known that his purse was by no means empty and he had offered to pay for everything in beautiful gold pieces of full weight. The poverty of the village was suddenly transformed into plenty.

Carquefou, now quite reassured, passed muster of the cattle and led the fattest to one side.

At noon, when he was stacking a larder with the leavings of the feast, they had not yet heard the crack of a musket.

Magnus tried anew to cross the marsh, now afoot, now ahorse; but always, despite his persistence, unsuccessfully. When he returned, exhausted by ineffectual effort, his visage was commencing to lower.

Evening came; and not a ball had fallen upon the village.

The dragoons supped. The youngest of them lost not a toothful; the veterans seemed unquiet. The uncertainty, more than the prospect of battle, weighed upon their hearts.

Armand-Louis reflected that, abundant as the resources of the village might be, they must be exhausted some day; and there must be no thought of revictualing by a sortie.

The dragoons went to sleep gloomily, wrapped in their cloaks. Each of them was making mute farewells to France. Far away, lost in the growing shadows, they could discern the fires kindled by the men of John of Werth, to lighten them in their work.

A white rocket whistled into the air on the right; two red ones were the response on the left.

"To-morrow," said Magnus, "we will know what these signals mean. When we do, death will be before us."

When night had well fallen, Armand-Louis besought his lieutenants to redouble their watchfulness at the outposts. Then he hurried to the side of Adrienne.

He found her playing with the child of the game-warden. The child's fever had abated. The father sat in a corner gazing now upon his boy, now upon the beautiful young foreigner. His face glowed with tenderness and gratitude. A burst of joyous laughter, a child's laughter, suddenly sounded and filled the house with gayety. The game-warden trembled and silently kissed the hem of Adrienne's robe. But noticing the entry of Armand-Louis, he dropped that delicate hand, kissing it, and withdrew.

"Well, what news?" asked Adrienne, as she rocked the child on her knee.

"I believe we have tired the enemy and that they are beating a retreat," answered Armand-Louis, whose face wore an untroubled expression that betrayed naught of their dire situation.

He sat beside Adrienne and they talked a while in a low voice. Armand-Louis replied and smiled as though they were still at St. Wast Castle. Nevertheless, at the slightest sound from without, he lent ear, fearing a surprise.

"What troubles and torments have I not caused you, dear friend," said Adrienne, taking note of his furtive glances toward the door.

Armand-Louis did not reply, but remained listening intently.

"You are hiding something from me," she added quickly.

"God is master," answered Armand-Louis with a tremor. "To-morrow we may make a desperate resolve. Until then, do not fear."

The night passed uninterruptedly. A glorious day followed it. It looked as though the Imperialists had not altered their mind. All the change noticeable lay in the earthworks that had been built in the night to the right and left of the road leading from the plain. The earth had likewise been thrown up at the other extremity of the village, on the forest-side, and presented the same ominous aspect.

Magnus, whose brow lowered, met the glance of Armand-Louis. Then he turned without saying a word.

Armand-Louis tapped him on the shoulder, saying:

"What does this mean?"

"Sir," replied the old soldier, "we pulled ourselves out of Magdebourg and out of Ravensnest Castle. We conquered at Drachenfeld; but I'm afraid we'll find our tomb here."

The sun was now high in the heavens, when, for the second time, the same officer, who had come for parley before, presented himself at the outposts.

"Night brings with it counsel sometimes," he said to Armand-Louis. "You have had two nights in which to reflect. Have you done so?"

"Yes."

"And you surrender?"

"No."

An expression of profound sadness overspread the countenance of the Bavarian.

"Perhaps, if I were in your place I should act as you do," he added. "Nevertheless, my heart bleeds at the thought of the shedding of so much noble blood."

"All our days are counted, sir. No drop of blood shall flow, unless God so wills."

Armand-Louis conducted the officer in person to the lines, after which every man flew to his post. The dragoons felt instinctively that the terrible day was come.

They had hardly drawn up in line ere a trumpet call resounded from the ranks of John of Werth. Almost immediately afterward a cloud of white smoke covered the road. A ball whistled through the branches of the barricade and felled a dragoon who, at two paces from Armand-Louis, was renewing the priming of his pistols.

"Ah, the breastworks!" cried Magnus.

Another roar answered the first volley and a ball that came from the depths of the valley, toppled over a tree at the door of a house.

The Huguenots understood now why John of Werth had left them undisturbed for a whole day.

"We shall soon be obliged to see these gentlemen at close range," said Renaud.

The cannons, of which there were two on either side, answering each other alternately, wrought terrible havoc,

but never broke the courage of the French. Some of them, including Renaud, leaped forward and by a better directed and more copious fire, succeeded in decimating the ranks of the enemy. Their platoons of greater number imitated this manoeuver and boldly led to the last line of houses under cover of walls and orchards, they gathered batteries here and picked off the cannonaders from the side of their guns.

In order to dislodge the besieged, columns of infantry were cast upon them, which were in turn shattered by the fury and expertness of the Huguenots, as the flinging of a stone shatters a vase of clay. Every field, garden and ditch was strewn with the dead.

Armand-Louis was ever the foremost in the attack and the last to retreat. Magnus never left his side.

In the intervals between assaults Renaud sent for news of Armand-Louis, as the latter also did to know how matters were progressing at his friend's post. Magnus and Carquefou, who acted as couriers, crossed in their hurried expeditions and exchanged a word as they passed.

"All goes well down there," said the old reiter. "We have twelve dead and twenty wounded—who are still fighting."

"On our side it hails—hails iron and lead," answered Carquefou. "I'm frozen in the marrow and burning in the face. Our men are dying a little."

At sunset a final charge, led by John of Werth in person, brought the Imperialists up to the barricade, whose thickness had been increased by a fresh stack of hewn trees. The Huguenots, weakened by cruel losses, had just been dislodged from their outposts. Armand-Louis serried his men and fell upon the enemy, who were striving to penetrate into the village by the breaches their balls had effected. He caught sight of John of Werth and he discerned the swordknot, embroidered by Adrienne, hanging from his hilt.

"Come hither, thou!" cried the Huguenot, felling a lansquenet at each blow to clear his way to the baron.

"Dost take me for an adventurer like thee? I am the general of an army," replied the Bavarian, as he directed his soldiers toward a point not well guarded.

M. d'Arrandes divined his purpose and rushed forward at the head of the little band he held in reserve. The terrific shock of the Huguenots stopped the Imperialists. They were attacked in front by M. d'Arrandes and on the flank by Armand-Louis. They withdrew, driven back, with swords in their vitals, through the orchard they had crossed. They held this position with difficulty.

At this juncture Renaud rejoined Armand-Louis.

"'Tis a good quarter of an hour that we've been doing nothing below there," he said. "I have left the command in the hands of M. de Saint-Paer and have come hither to see how things are. 'Twas the awful noise in this quarter that bothered my ears."

With a bound he was in the thick of the strife.

Madame d'Igomer, who watched the battle ahorse from a small hill, wearing a velvet doublet in the belt of which hung a poinard, saw him forcing a passage in the midst of the combatants. A mixture of rage, admiration and sorrow suddenly changed the expression of her features.

"Ah, if he had only loved me!" she murmured.

At this moment, John of Werth, who was roaring like a lion torn from its prey, strove to drive back the fleeing by beating them with the flat of his sword, but darkness fell upon the plain.

"The game's postponed," he said, finally.

The cannons, which had not been fired since the men were fighting hand to hand, bellowed anew.

"Halt!" cried Armand-Louis.

In the first ranks of those who stopped at the sound of his voice, Armand-Louis saw M. d'Arrandes. He gave him his hand, saying:

"Ah, you arrived in good time, friend."

"Thus, Captain, you can one day say to the Viscount d'Arrandes, my father, that I did my duty," cried the gentleman, joyously.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE MARSH.

Armand-Louis, his heart throbbing with joy over his victory, walked through the ranks of his friends. A goodly number of them failed to answer the roll-call. Many others, covered with blood, could no longer lift either sword or musket. Some lay in their cloaks awaiting death. The eyes of all of them were turned towards the setting sun. Perhaps they were thinking of France, hidden below the horizon.

At the first sound of this furious battle, Adrienne had leaped out of the cottage in which slept the sick child. Diana followed her, gasping for breath, with distended nostrils.

The game-warden, still gloomy and absorbed, walked behind them.

"Dost hear? It is the cannon," said Diana.

"Yes, it is the cannon," murmured the warden.

"Oh! They are lost!" cried Adrienne.

"Ah. A ball goes farther than a sword. To-day or to-morrow all will be over," added the warden.

Diana seized the arm of Adrienne feverishly, saying:

"I have always thought that a terrible day would come which should summon all the energy of a woman's heart. Dost thou not feel the same resolution?"

"I understand it," replied Adrienne.

"God forgive me if it be a crime, but never while I live shall I fall again into the hands of John of Werth!"

"They are of the same age as was my poor daughter," murmured the warden, the tears flowing slowly down his cheek.

Towards evening the child, which Adrienne had watched and fondled like a mother, for three days, called her to his bedside.

"Kiss me," he said to her, "and I will sleep well."

Adrienne kissed the child, and while Diana, pale and haggard, looked out of the window, hearkening the clamor of the assault, she knelt by the bed, joining her hands and prayed:

"Lord, my God, I have sacrificed my life to you, spare him whose name you read in my heart."

The warden, who had been walking up and down in the room, suddenly drew near her and laying his hand on her shoulder, said:

"I had sworn to let all your people die in this corner of the world, as my two sons have died. But you have saved the life of this child. I will save you and all who are with you."

Adrienne stood up and regarded him in amazement.

"Asa has never lied," continued the warden. "You have opened the way to my heart by pity. When night is quite fallen, tell him who came to see you yesterday, together with his companions in arms, that I swear to you, I will save you all."

Meanwhile the dragoons whom death had spared were busy in digging trenches in which to bury their unhappy comrades, who had fallen in battle.

Even M. de Collonges was grave. The trenches were many, and many also were the wounded. He was calculating for how many hours the defense might last, and he scarcely found sufficient for two days, after which none should survive, so swiftly did death swing his scythe. At this time in the midst of the flaring torches which illuminated the spots where the battle had raged most fiercely, Adrienne appeared, searching for Armand-Louis. The men gathered here moved away that they might be alone. In a broken voice she told him what she had just heard from the warden.

"I have faith in the word of this man," she added. "Therefore assemble the dragoons in the village square."

"God is with us," cried Armand-Louis.

At this cry, the dragoons who had gone away came rushing towards him and he informed them of the promise made by Asa to his sweetheart. Soon the strange news, that a man had promised to rescue those who were left of the Huguenots, was borne from mouth to mouth.

An hour later the entire squadron was arrayed in the order of battle in the village square.

The better to hide the retreat, Armand-Louis and Renaud took care to set blazing great fires along the stretch of barricades and at the abandoned bridge. The sentries exchanged halloas as they moved away to make it believed that the guard was to be prolonged until morning. The Huguenots formed in the order of march noisily. Carquefou flung his hat into the air, saying: "Another hour of this life, enameled with balls, and the excitement should have killed me!"

Almost immediately the warden arrived with torches. He kindled one and approaching Armand-Louis, he said:

"Divide your soldiers into two platoons of twenty, and let the one who marches at the head of each bear a torch."

The ranks of the squadron broke, and each platoon was formed in silence.

"Now, follow me," said Asa.

He walked at the head of the column and led the way towards the marsh, which belted the village with rushes and weeds.

For some time he searched at the border of the stagnant water, then halting beside an uprooted willow, he said:

"This is the place." Then turning to Armand-Louis, he pointed to the marsh whose surface was covered with sword-grass and weeds. A light breeze rippled the water.

"The way of safety lies before us," he continued. "No one knows it, excepting me. I will go first, the two young ladies shall follow me, the men after us."

"And I will be the last," said Armand-Louis.

"Let each of you be very careful to ride your horses in my tracks," added Asa. "If one of you goes out of the line of my march, he will be lost in the swamp. The path is not broad, only one man can ride abreast. Keep your ears and eyes open. All that vigilance can secure I promise, the rest belongs to God."

"But," asked M. de Collonges, "will not these torches light us on our way?"

"Look at the fires which glide across the marsh. How

many women cross themselves when they see those errant flames! Do you believe that the torches which are to guide you will increase their number?"

Having said this, Asa urged his horse into the marsh. The water splashed up from the animal's hoofs. Renaud seized the warden by the arm.

"By the blood of Christ, this is not reason," he said.

"She saved my child," said Asa, pointing to Adrienne, "and you mistrust me."

Then he advanced. Adrienne followed him resolutely, and the whole troop did likewise.

The wind rose and shook the bushy forests of the weeds, which murmured plaintively.

At times a wild bird, awakened by the passage of the cavaliers, sprang up with a cry and with frightened wing skimmed the cloak of a dragoon. Soon the last soldier had left the shore and Armand-Louis followed him. Naught disturbed the silence in which the village slept save the occasional halloas of the Imperial sentries. The long line of Huguenots plunged further and further into the marsh. They rode slowly one after the other, seeking each other's tracks, the head of each horse on the crupper of the horse which preceded. None spoke. The torches, shaking in the wind, threw red streaks of light upon the dismal surface of the water, which were lost in the midst of the weeds. At times the horses sank in the slime up to their houghs. Once or twice their great breasts almost disappeared in a bed of floating grass, but just when the earth seemed to be lost beneath their feet, they found a solid soil which lay hidden from all eyes under the sleeping water.

Asa did not keep a regular gait. He hesitated and glanced about him, then he leaned over the mane of his horse, consulting the still surface of the marsh with a piercing eye, sounding the thick mesh of grass, turning to the right, then to the left, then stopping for a minute or making a sign to Adrienne who followed him, when he would beat about until he found again the invisible line of passage, which wound under the water. At this a smile would brighten his pale visage, and he would press forward again before her.

This long journey lasted almost two hours. Finally a wooded shore appeared by the dim light of the stars, a more solid footing grew under the horses' feet, and a leap bore Asa upon the steep bank of the marsh. He turned, and each dragoon in his turn did likewise. Not a single man had strayed. Armand-Louis was the last. Before him the country spread out, hidden by a curtain of forest.

A spontaneous impulse threw Adrienne and Diana into each other's arms. Armand-Louis uncovered. All the cavaliers imitated him, and a deep sigh of benediction rose to God. All these brave soldiers had left death behind them and hope seemed to be calling them to the other end of the horizon.

"Take the road to the right," said Asa, pointing to the north. "Follow it until you come to a cross of stone. There take the road which is built of stone. Each step you make in that direction will put you further from the Imperialists."

Meanwhile the dragoons, who had drawn up in battle array, shook their damp cloaks. Armand-Louis drew a long purse from his pocket and tried to pass it to the warden. But the first words of the sombre Catholic stopped him.

"You owe me nothing," he said. "I did this for a woman and not for you. God is my witness that if you had been alone, I should have left the village to its fate and would have done nothing to save you."

Asa brushed back his hair, which was wet with the moisture of the marsh, and, casting a glance upon the cavaliers, he added:

"One thing amazes me, which is, that I, Asa Herr, have had the heart to save from death soldiers serving under the Swedish colors. May the bones of my sons forgive me! And now farewell."

He took Adrienne's hand, bore it respectfully to his lips, and leaped back into the marsh. Almost immediately his silhouette was lost in the blackness of the night.

"Your goodness," said Armand-Louis, approaching Adrienne, "has done more for our salvation than our own courage."

Then, with resolute tread, he urged his horse along the path which Asa had indicated.

Sunrise surprised them at the cross of stone, where the roads intersected. As far as the eye could reach they could see neither cavalry nor infantry.

"Gentlemen," said M. de Collonges gaily, "behold us now as Ulysses when he escaped from the cave of Polyphemus. Let us gallop a little to warm our blood."

As they were driving on towards the north, John of Werth commanded his batteries to open fire again. Lodged in fields and orchards, his musketeers awaited a rally of the Huguenots. Astonished at hearing or seeing nothing, John of Werth led a reconnoitre as far as the barricade.

Not a ball shot out from the branches. The captain, who was versed in stratagem, feared an ambush. He drew up his troop behind a rising ground and commanded the batteries to redouble fire.

In the village all remained silent and undisturbed.

A few of the more hardy pikemen scaled a wall around which a goodly number of their comrades had found death the evening before. They ventured even beyond posts they had until now been unable to attain.

Madame d'Igomer, who saw them suddenly scatter like a flight of birds of prey behind the barricade which masked the village, gave her impatient steed free rein, and, leaping over the obstacles, came up with them in a few seconds.

The main street, so long and so heroically defended by the dragoons, opened before her. Some few women were walking here and drawing water from the fountains.

In an instant she had gained the limits of the village. Everywhere were to be seen pools of blood and mounds of freshly turned earth; but nowhere a single soldier. Far away in the distance the road stretched deserted.

"But where can they be?" she cried, tormented by a maddening rage.

It was now two or three hours since the game-warden had returned to his cottage.

John of Werth had followed Madame d'Igomer at the head of a regiment.

"Do you understand this?" she asked him. "I tell you Satan protects them."

But John of Werth did not believe in such mysterious protection. He was quite sure that the Huguenots had not escaped by the road which crept down the valley. He stopped the first peasant that passed.

"Dost thou know whether there be any path through the marsh?" he asked.

"Our fathers have spoken of a path which could be seen years ago," answered the peasant trembling. "But the secret has long since been lost. The game-warden, Asa, used to run across it, when he was young, in order to surprise the ducks. I was a little child then. A great many people have been drowned in trying to imitate him."

John of Werth desired to see Asa, and was conducted to his cottage.

"I am told that thou knowest the path which leads across the marsh," he said. "We have discovered the hoof prints of many horses on its borders. Hast thou served as guide to the Huguenots?"

"Me!" answered the warden. "I have been watching this child all night along. Besides my two sons died in fighting the Swedes. One at Leipzig, the other at the passage of the Lech."

"And thou believest that if the cursed Huguenots, whom we are pursuing, have set foot in this marsh without a guide, not one of them will leave it alive?"

"Not a single one."

John of Werth left the cottage.

"Oh my sons!" murmured the warden, as he kissed his sleeping child.

CHAPTER XXIX.

WOLF AND SHE-WOLF.

Madame d'Igomer herself had discovered many hoof-prints in divers places on the shore of the marsh. She looked for them under the water and saw them vanish here and there in the midst of a bed of grass which the wind caused to foam. Her anxious looks questioned the horizon. Had those whom she was pursuing with indefatigable hate succeeded in crossing this reputed unfordable spot, or were they sleeping under the surface of this leaden water? The space replied not. She heard only the plaintive cries of the curlews beating their wings among the weeds. A thousand variant sentiments troubled her heart. It was mingling of joy and deep and violent pain. He who had betrayed her and whom she had loved, had he not paid the penalty with his life? What a death was this in the sinister waters of a marsh, and how well her vengeance had served her! But the last look of Renaud had doubtless met that of Diana, their hands had joined in a supreme clasp, death had united them, and now nought could ever separate them. Suddenly the thought that perhaps they had succeeded in reaching the opposite bank crossed her mind. A shudder passed through her frame and she thought only of retracing them to capture them and inflict her worst upon them.

John of Werth was only half assured by the declaration of the game-warden. He had too often witnessed the incredible resources which Armand-Louis and Renaud drew from their courage and their address, not to doubt that they had once more overcome the obstacles heaped up in their way. Further, would they have exposed their companions to an almost certain death if they had

not by some means secured the secret of crossing the marsh?

Such he knew their character to be, that they would have twenty times preferred to gallop their horses into his cannons' mouths and upon his saber blades, thus breaking a way through his ranks or perishing in the effort. The hoofprints on the muddy edge of the marsh were everywhere very numerous on the right as well as on the left shore. The cattle of the village and the beasts of burden were wont to haunt these places for pasture. The peasants who were questioned answered vaguely. Some had seen nothing, others had slept. The most of them, mad with terror, declared that since the siege of the village had begun they had not left their cottages. In fine, no information could be gained from them. Weary of questioning them, John of Werth sent scouts here and there to find the exact spot at which a body of cavalry might have crossed. Their zeal was spurred by the anxious anger and feverish impatience of Madame d'Igomer. She rode along the edge of the marsh, leaning over her horse's neck, searching for a trace which should put her on the track of the fugitives. Suddenly she was seen to stop, and pointing to a spread of glade marked in a straight line by the hoofs of fifty horses, she cried:

"There it is! There!"

"I see nothing except the hoofprints which are everywhere to be found," said John of Werth, who had galloped up to her in answer to her call.

"But look there," replied Madame d'Igomer, pointing to a bow of ribbon, which floated among the bushes a short distance from the shore. "She passed there. That bit of silk hanging on the bush, does it not prove what I said? Ah, I recognize it. This scarlet bow was worn by Mademoiselle de Pardaillan at her breast. Behold the path under the water, behold the deep hoofprints, one after the other, which lose themselves in the distance."

"'Tis true," said John of Werth. "If they have passed, shall we not pass also? Ah, that bow of ribbon, I want to know whether Renaud de Chaufontaine did not fall beside it."

"What are you going to do?"

"Show you the way. Will you follow me if I succeed?" Then inspired by the demon of hate, Madame d'Igomer spurred her horse into the marsh before any one could stop her.

"Beware, you are tempting God," cried out one of the peasants, whom John of Werth had been questioning.

But her horse's hoofs had just struck solid ground. Madame d'Igomer shook her hand with disdain and pursued her perilous course. The scarlet bow of ribbon, which her eyes never quitted, attracted her like a magnet. For some minutes the cavaliers of John of Werth followed her with their eyes, hesitating on the shore, tempted to follow her, but awed by the mysteries of this spread of water, which was veiled here and there by reeds and bushes.

"And you are men, soldiers!" cried back Madame d'Igomer, who rode still onward.

Eight or ten cavaliers galloped in her tracks. John of Werth never stirred.

"If they find the pass I shall follow," he murmured.

The cavaliers rode chancefully, some recklessly, some with circumspection. After an advance of a hundred steps one of them sank suddenly into a gut, his horse disappearing up to the breast. Another felt the mire cave under him and leaped back. A third slipped into a hole and with difficulty swam back to the shore. Then they all halted.

Madame d'Igomer continued to advance alone. The bow of scarlet ribbon nodded in the wind and smiled to the sun.

Suddenly her horse stumbled. One of his hind legs sank up to the haunch. With a violent effort he tore himself out of the mire only to fall into a hole at the other side. For an instant he struggled to regain the path he had lost. Each strain plunged him deeper into the mire. His hoofs beat the mud frantically, splashing it up into the eyes of his mistress, till it almost blinded her. Then the water reached to her knees. Despite her brave heart she was terrified.

"Help! Help!" she screamed.

John of Werth set the example by plunging resolutely into the marsh. Several of his men followed him.

But the frightened steed of Madame d'Igomer no longer obeyed the bridle, and leaping and kicking madly only dug deeper into the sinking earth. He reared suddenly, slipped and fell on his side.

"Help! Help!" screamed Madame d'Igomer anew.

Buried up to her shoulders, her hands clutched wildly at the bushes. The weight dragged them down, they bent and the water reached up to her chin. She uttered a piercing shriek, her arms beat the slimy waters convulsively, and then she vanished beneath them.

John of Werth urged his horse straight ahead. He was dumbstruck, and the pallor of death was on his brow. When he reached the hole into which Madame d'Igomer had been buried alive the green, greasy water was placid as a mirror. A silk scarf, which he picked up on the point of his sword, was the sole sign that a woman had disappeared there.

For a moment John of Werth glanced at the edge of the abyss, harrowed by the silence which succeeded the struggle of youth against death. Two or three men who had dismounted attempted, with him, to drag Madame d'Igomer from her tomb, but the marsh-bed yielded not its prey.

Convinced that they could do nothing and that if they succeeded in discovering her body, it would not be the only one to be borne back to the shore, John of Werth remounted.

"Now let us avenge her!" he said.

Then, having regained the shore, he commanded a part of his troop to speed along the north road while he, at the head of the others, undertook to round the marsh.

The French had a great advance upon them, but couriers sent in all directions could not fail to overtake them. Their only care was not to mistake the route that had been followed.

Towards evening one of the couriers returned to John of Werth. He had discovered the tracks of the Huguenots,

"Dead or alive, I'll have them," cried the baron, digging the spurs into his winded horse.

His mad chase carried him into a territory covered with the corpses of men and horses. Far away a fleece of white smoke blanched the crest of the heather.

"Curse them," roared John of Werth, "they have passed here," and he spurred his horse anew.

In truth Armand-Louis and Renaud had just passed. When they reached this country they found a body of cavalry, which barred their way at a chain of hills into which opened a narrow defile. They had needs gain this point with the utmost celerity. To parley meant the loss of precious moments, and would have allowed the Imperialists to form ranks. Divided as they now were, the Huguenots might break through their line almost without striking a blow.

A rising ground enabled the Huguenots to arrive just before the encampment.

"Let us trot now," said Armand-Louis. "When within pistol range, gallop all together."

The sight of the squadron suddenly debouched on the plain at first surprised the Imperialists. Some of them leaped to their saddles; others prepared their arms while remaining on foot. The attitude of the squadron approaching on an easy trot drove all mistrust from their minds. Nevertheless two or three cavaliers were sent out to reconnoitre them.

Armand-Louis advanced constantly. Adrienne and Diana were in the midst of the troop, flanked by ten dragoons, chosen from the stoutest and best mounted of his men.

They allowed the cavaliers to draw near. Then when the latter summoned them to halt, at a sign from Armand-Louis, the Huguenots dashed madly upon the encampment, pistols in hand.

They were as a rushing torrent upon a field of ripe corn. The hole they made was broad and bloody, and hardly half the Imperialists had drawn sabre ere the Huguenots galloped towards the defile.

A few stray balls followed them as they attained the foot of the hill-range.

John of Werth reached the spot as the Imperialists, comparable to a flock of wild birds dispersed by the shot of a hunter, were consulting as to what course they should pursue.

The horse of the baron shuddered as he drew up and dropped dead.

"You hesitate?" he cried, as he made known his identity.

He flung a wounded cavalier from his saddle, and, taking his place, said:

"Forward! Ten ducats of gold to the first man who kills a Huguenot!"

An old officer took the baron's bridle in his hand and, pointing before him, said:

"Behold, my lord!"

John of Werth looked and saw the dragoons heaving great boulders of rock into the defile. The roar of the massive rocks as they rolled down the mountain side reached his ears.

"How many of us are there?" asked John of Werth.

"About a thousand."

"Good. Five hundred of us will fall and five hundred will pass. Forward!"

The Imperialists, inspired by the voice of the baron, galloped onward at a mad pace.

CHAPTER XXX.

A FIGHT TO THE DEATH.

Armand-Louis, who had been observing the enemy, collected his dragoons around him.

"Monsieur de Saint-Paer," he said, "you will take one hundred men with you and ride straight ahead to the end of the defile. Perhaps, and this is my hope, you will find some Swedes at the other side of the mountain. Then Mademoiselle de Pardaillan and Mademoiselle de Souvigny will be saved. Renaud and I and Monsieur Voltras and Monsieur de Collonges will sustain the attack of the Imperialists. Fifty men will suffice to guard this passage."

"Why do you not yourself remain with the young ladies?" cried M. de Saint-Paer. "It is our part to fight, your part to save them."

"If the Swedes are not on the other side of the mountain, will not your mission be the more perilous? It is with your sword that you must hew your way to them."

M. de Saint-Paer was about to reply.

"Have you not freely chosen me as your commander?" asked Armand-Louis.

"Yes."

"Then, sir, obey. It is no longer your friend who speaks, it is your captain."

Then, as the brow of M. de Saine-Paer darkened sadly, Armand-Louis took his hand, saying:

"You have two wounds, I know, sir. Give the others a chance to show later such glorious scars."

Meanwhile, the Imperialists came galloping, mad with a thirst for blood. The farewells of the dragoons were hasty, sad, almost mute. Adrienne and Diana, who had not heard the above conversation, set out, astonished at not finding Armand-Louis and Renaud at their side. At

the first turn which the defile made in the mountain, M. de Saint-Paer heard a crash as of thunder behind him. It was the beginning of the fusillade.

"Oh, God!" cried Adrienne, "they are fighting." As she spoke, both she and Diana reined up their horses.

"Madame," said M. de Saint-Paer, "you are in my charge. I have answered for your safety upon my honor. Forward."

The two young women lowered their veils to hide their tears, and as their steeds followed the pass of the defile, the roar of the conflict gradually died in the distance behind them. M. de Saint-Paer rode in the rear, with bowed head.

It should be remembered that the boulders of rock cast down by the Huguenots blocked the defile. But the spaces between them allowed two or three men to pass at the risk of life.

John of Werth, furious with rage, led the Imperialists against this improvised rampart.

There was one thousand on one side, fifty on the other. But the narrow road was full of windings. Scarcely two men could march abreast, and every ball from the rocks above felled one of them. A wall of corpses soon grew up before the wall of stone. The Imperialists did not count their dead; but kept advancing constantly.

The dragoons were on foot, having hidden their horses behind the angle of an enormous rock. When one of them fell wounded, he sat up and ceased fighting only at the last ebb of his life-blood.

At times a savage onslaught bore some of the Imperialists up to the crest of the rocks, or gliding in between masses which no effort could break. But then sword-points or butt of muskets met them. Magnus and Carquefou had armed themselves with long pikes, on which they spitted the assailants. "This is an exercise which recalls to me the siege of Berg-Op-Zoom," said Magnus, "when with great lance blows we precipitated Spaniards into ditches full of water."

"Alas," replied Carquefou, "these pike strokes make me think of the kitchen of St. Wast Castle. But there

we spitted only honest capons. We had good appetites there and no goose-flesh as now."

Evening fell. Then darkness rose from the depths of the valley and enveloped the mountain. The blows became less frequent and attacks less rapid. The Imperialists seemed tired of making a pasture of the dead. A final wave of men had been broken against the wall, behind which the Huguenots were intrenched. Soon the voices of the officers could be heard, commanding the retreat.

"Where dost thou fancy the young ladies are now?" Armand-Louis asked of Renaud.

"In the plain doubtless," replied the latter.

The order to mount passed softly from mouth to mouth. Each dragoon in turn left his fighting post. Armand-Louis, Renaud, Magnus and Carquefou were the last to stand up noiselessly. They sighed as they looked at those who could never rise again. M. de Voltras and M. de Collonges were alone. The latter was bent over in his saddle, his hand gripped on the pommel. The other sat erect and smiling.

The horses of the dead were led by the bridle, and Armand-Louis, who remained in the rear, gave the signal to set out.

Only twenty men were there. Thirty slept in eternal sleep, their faces upturned to heaven.

The dragoons left behind them a wall impassable to cavalry; but since night had fallen John of Werth, who suspected a flight similar to that which had saved them once before, had a troop of determined men charge against the barricade every quarter of an hour. He judged of the presence of the Huguenots by the blows with which they answered these attacks.

When the troop was scattered Armand-Louis signalled to Renaud, Magnus and Carquefou; the four of them returned to their tracks. They hid themselves in the fissures of the rocks at the moment when a slight noise gave them to believe that a new assault was being attempted.

Spying from their ambush they saw shadows moving along the defile and silently approaching them.

"Fire!" cried Armand-Louis suddenly. Four shots cracked on the air. Four shadows vanished.

Seizing the muskets of the men lying dead, the four fired again. The assailants then retreated.

"They are still there," thought John of Werth.

Without losing a minute, Armand-Louis jumped into saddle, and, followed by Renaud, Magnus and Carquefou, galloped upon the tracks of M. de Voltras and M. de Collonges. Carquefou rubbed his hands the whole length of his body and said to Magnus:

"Dost fancy that I am still alive?"

"Almost," replied the veteran.

"If thou swear it, I believe thee. But I am astonished at it."

They soon regained their company, and together they arrived at the extremity of the defile. New horizons opened before their gaze. The rising sun disclosed a peaceful country. In the distance they saw columns of smoke, and at the edge of a large field the troop of M. de St. Paer was awaiting in good order the coming of Armand-Louis.

"There they are!" cried M. de Collonges joyously, who was the first to decry them. M. de Voltras, who for the past hour had been riding with bowed head, smiled and fell from his saddle.

"Farewell," he said, "at least the Imperialists will not take me alive."

And he gave up his soul, his hand clutching his sword-hilt.

While Armand-Louis and Renaud, broken with fatigue and devoured with fever, seated themselves beside Adrienne and Diana under the shade of a cluster of trees, Carquefou and Magnus kept guard on either side.

Almost immediately one of them discerned a troop of cavaliers in tremendous haste coming down the defile of the mountain, which the Huguenots had just crossed, and the other beheld far off in the plain a cloud of dust streaked with a thousand flashes.

"Above there, John of Werth," said Carquefou.

"Below the unknown!" said Magnus.

"Everywhere nothing but blows! Zounds but 'tis

pleasant this travelling in Germany," added Carquefou.

M. de Saint-Paer approached Armand-Louis. "Our horses are exhausted," he said. "On this side there is a curtain of trees, beyond the brook. Perhaps 'tis there that we shall die."

Armand-Louis glanced towards the mountain. "John of Werth can have but a handful of men with him. The danger therefore lies not in his quarter," said he. "Let us march upon this squadron which is coming towards us, and, sword in hand, let us by a final effort conquer some horses to replace those who are quivering under our spurs."

The dragoons serried ranks. At Armand-Louis' gesture, as he pointed his sword toward the plain, they all knew what he expected from them. A shiver ran through the valiant troop and they all nerved themselves to fall in this supreme struggle. None hoped to come out of it alive.

As they approached the brook indicated by M. de Saint-Paer, a blast of wind brushed the dust-cloud which enveloped the squadron. They could now distinguish the men, the horses, the arms.

"The Swedes!" cried Magnus.

A trembling ran through the decimated ranks of the La Guerche Dragoons.

"Long live King Gustavus Adolphus!" roared the impetuous voice of Armand-Louis.

And, as if the new-born ardor of the Huguenots had passed from their souls to electrify the flanks of their steeds, each horse, which had seemed almost foundered, bounded off at a gallop.

The brook was crossed, the plain flew under the hoofs and Armand-Louis flung himself into the astonished arms of Arnold of Brahé.

Adrienne and Diana were kneeling on the ground before the whole regiment, and with hands uplifted were rendering thanks to God.

The Swedes waved their flags and sabres. The dragoons had hung their hats on the point of their swords. A deafening series of roars rose to the heavens.

"Behold our Iliad at an end," cried Renaud, kissing in

transport Diana's hand. "Now that all's past I may confess, that I have been mightily afraid."

"Three hundred of us set out and fifty return," said M. de Saint Paer.

When the dragoons turned their attention again to the Huguenots, they saw that John of Werth had wheeled about and was marching along the foot of the mountain. His sword hung in his scabbard.

For some time Armand-Louis followed him with his eyes.

"Are you beating about the country, or are you the advance guard of the army?" he at length asked Arnold of Brahé.

"The king's army entire is near here," replied Arnold. "One part lies on the left, the other behind us. That of the Duke of Friedland occupies a formidable position on the right. Gustavus Adolphus is going to meet it. Battle is imminent, and this battle between Sweden and Austria will decide the destiny of Germany."

"Ah," cried Renaud, "we arrive in good time."

"A little too soon perhaps," Carquefou murmured timidly.

Renaud glared at him askance.

"'Tis but a personal opinion," added Carquefou, "and applies only to me."

Armand-Louis meanwhile kept his eyes on the little band led by John of Werth. "The assurance of his march, the direction he follows, both convince me that he knows fully whither he is bound," he said at length.

"And you are not mistaken. Before this evening he will be in the quarters of General Wallenstein at Lutzen."

Renaud, who had heard every word of this short dialogue, approached Armand-Louis.

"Captain," he said, "you are questioning Arnold of Brahé as though you had a project in view."

"There's something missing from this hilt," answered Armand-Louis, lightly touching his sword.

"A sword-knot perhaps?"

"Thou hast said it."

"And thou wilt seek it out?"

Armand-Louis nodded.

"'Tis mad, but I'm with thee," replied Renaud.

"Now not a word," pursued Armand-Louis. "Four eyes are watching us, four beautiful eyes, which read our souls. Magnus and Carquefou will be of our company."

"Thou knowest well that the one goes nowhere without the other."

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE WOLF AT BAY.

One hour later, while Adrienne and Diana were being taken to the camp of the king, under the escort of a guard of honor, four well mounted men galloped on the tracks of John of Werth.

Had any one met them they would have taken Armand-Louis, Renaud, Magnus and Carquefou for four body guards of His Excellency the Duke of Friedland. They wore his uniform, his arms and colors. Magnus had secured a complete disguise and they spurred intrepidly onward towards the enemy's lines.

It was not long before they reached the outposts of the Imperial army, where they declared themselves to be special couriers. All opposition disappeared before their uniforms. Some of the soldiers against whom they had fought the evening before even told them where they might best look for John of Werth, for whom, said Magnus, they had important messages. They learned also that all the companies scattered throughout the land had received orders to join the grand army.

An aide-de-camp whom they met informed them that during the night John of Werth had received a courier from the commander-in-chief and that, despairing of ever capturing the Huguenots, he thought now only of his official duties. According to this message, he was provisionally to halt in a village situated at the extreme left of the base of operations, and here await further instructions.

"I believe that it is just these instructions which we are taking to him," Armand-Louis replied hardily.

"Make haste then. The Bavarian general may remain only a few hours in the house where he is stopping." Then the aide-de-camp saluted Armand-Louis and disappeared.

"Zounds!" said Carquefou, "this village whither we are being sent looks to be just like a cavern."

"That is why we must go to it," replied Renaud.

Armand-Louis always galloped ahead. When the four cavaliers reached the village, night had quite fallen. They rode through the streets, which were incumbered with soldiers and arms, without molestation. In the middle of the place they saw a large house resplendent with light. Within was John of Werth. Four body guards stalled their horses in a yard nearby and emptied a bag of oats before them. The poor beasts were jaded.

Towards midnight Magnus, who never slept with more than one eye, noticed a courier run up his foaming horse before the house of the Bavarian general. This courier bore the livery of Wallenstein. Magnus nudged Carquefou with his elbow.

"Get thou some flagons of old wine and two or three jugs of brandy," said he, "while I go and keep guard below there."

When Magnus spoke Carquefou had the habit to obey unquestioningly. While Magnus directed his steps towards the door which the courier had just entered, Carquefou hurried down a neighboring street, determined to find flagons and jugs well filled even if he had to pillage every inn cellar in the village. Soon afterwards Wallenstein's courier came out of the house of John of Werth. Magnus accosted him and, having invited him to refresh himself, he conducted him to the spot where he had left Carquefou. Carquefou had secured both the wine and the brandy.

"Ah, comrade," said Magnus, breaking the neck of a bottle, "a drink or two can do you no harm. You look like a man who has ridden too fast not to be thirsty."

"My throat is as dry as a bit of old leather, and my palate as hard as horn," replied the cavalier, seizing a bottle and gluing it with both hands to his lips.

This fraternal reception disposed the courier to become confidential. He did not conceal from the two good fellows who welcomed him so cordially that he was fagged out after galloping all day, and that the prospect of serv-

ing as guide to John of Werth in a new expedition simply appalled him.

"I have had no sleep for the last three nights," he said.

"Bah!" interposed Magnus, handing him another bottle, "the general will surely give you time to take a rest."

"Not at all. We must start out at once. The despatches which I gave him are very urgent and he is not the man to lose any time."

Magnus exchanged a wink with Carquefou. The cavalier drank, closed his eyes, drank again and yawned so widely that he was in danger of dislocating his jaws.

"Baron John of Werth resembles somewhat the Duke of Friedland," continued the cavalier. "As the general, so the lieutenant. With them a man must march straight or die. That is what awaits me."

"You interest me, my friend," replied Magnus, "and if the proposition be agreeable to you, I know somebody who would perhaps take your place."

"Who?"

"Myself."

The cavalier opened wide his eyes in amazement.

"Whatever I do it is in goodness of heart," added Magnus. "Is John of Werth going far?"

"To headquarters now, but he will pass through a large town where there is some artillery. The roads are bad, a bridge across a river is half broken. If I fall asleep, good-night, I will break my neck."

"My dear friend," interposed Carquefou, "you must not break anything."

"It is imprudent," added Magnus. "I who know the roads will cross the bridge straight."

The courier could no longer see clearly. His leaden head tossed from one shoulder to the other, but he still had a ray of reason left.

"Yes," he replied, "you are very prompt to help people. There have been wolves who have taken the skin of a shepherd to devour the sheep."

Then Magnus said with an innocent air:

"You are not stupid, comrade. The truth is that, together with the desire to serve you there is a wish to curry the good graces of the field marshal, Wallenstein."

Our friend here, who will not leave you a drop of this excellent wine if you do not be wary, has, like me, certain peccadillos to be eased by performing some honest service."

"One cannot be perfect," Carquefou commented, never ceasing to fill the courier's bumper.

"That is why," added Magnus, "we desire to be the ones that shall lead John of Werth in triumph to headquarters. This done, pardon will be ours."

"Pardon for you; and for me, what?" cried the cavalier.

"For you five ducats of gold. Behold them here!"

The courier took the five pieces, shook them in his hand, laughed stupidly and replied with half-shut eyes:

"Ha! Ha! I am no gudgeon. I knew cursed well that there was an eel under the rock. I'm a good devil; so be off and break your back in my place. Good luck attend you! Stay; don't tell this to the comrades whom I left at the village gate. They would want a bite off my cake."

As he spoke the courier slid the ducats into his pocket, not without exceeding difficulty discovering this receptacle.

The door of John of Werth's house was opened. Several men came out and hurried towards the stables.

"Holloa!" numbled the courier in a thick voice, "Baron John of Werth is making ready to leave. He does not know you, he may question you. If he says 'Prague,' answer 'Friedland.'"

The head of the courier dropped down on his breast and he fell fast asleep.

"Make haste now!" murmured Magnus.

The courier had been cautiously laid on a bed of straw and locked in the stable. Magnus and Carquefou detailed their adventure to Armand-Louis and Renaud, and the four hurriedly mounted and posted themselves at the door of John of Werth.

The Bavarian appeared. As he leaped into his saddle he cast a rapid glance at the four cavaliers. By the light of a torch which was held by a groom, he recognized the uniform of Wallenstein's body guard, but he did not see

the man who had come into his presence a short while before.

"Where's the courier?" he asked.

Magnus leaned over toward John of Werth and gave the military salute, saying:

"We took care of him; he is sleeping in there."

Then in a weak voice, and without the flutter of an eyelid, under the stern glance of John of Werth, he added in a mysterious tone:

"I am called 'Prague,' as he is called 'Friedland.'"

"Let's be off," said the Bavarian.

John of Werth took with him only one officer.

Magnus and Carquefou rode in advance, Armand-Louis and Renaud remained in the rear, and the entire company plunged into the open country, which lay flooded in the light of the moon.

They cut through space, their heads above their steeds, the skirts of their long cloaks floating in the breeze behind them. They passed swift as shadows by trees, houses and mills, challenged only by the snarling bark of occasional dogs. John of Werth at times exchanged a few words with his aide-de-camp.

At length a white line, broadening on the horizon, announced the coming of morning. The pale light descending from the sky revealed a river in their path, and across this river lay a stone bridge whose arches were half broken. The church spire of a town stood up away in the distance. At the moment when Magnus and Carquefou galloped on the bridge, the sound of a whistle pierced the air. They both halted abruptly midway between the two shores. John of Werth and his aide-de-camp mechanically reined up their horses. Armand-Louis and Renaud were upon them in an instant.

"What's wrong?" cried John of Werth.

"I am Armand-Louis of La Guerche," said the Huguenot uncovering, "and here is my friend, the Marquis Renaud of Chaufontaine, who will be my witness."

John of Werth gazed about him.

"It boots naught to look for help," interposed Renaud.

"Magnus and Carquefou, whom I beg to introduce, keep good guard there. Nobody is near. We are four and

you are two. The simplest thing for you to do is to unsheath."

"Now if this duel be not to your taste," added Armand-Louis, "or if you do not care to run its chances, you can avoid it by giving me that swordknot you wear."

John of Werth, smiling with a disdainful air, replied:

"I fancied I had to deal with a man of war, not with a comedian. Near here are two armies which are to play the game of battles for the crowns of two nations. Your place is marked out for you on one side, as mine is for me on the other. Let the quarrel between an emperor and a king be settled and I swear to you on my word of a gentleman that we will meet whenever your good pleasure wills."

"I have you here," answered Armand-Louis, "and I'll keep you. Only one of us must fall, and thus the armies will be only one soldier less and they can fight."

The plain was deserted. Not a human being could be seen on either side of the river. John of Werth's gaze surveyed the horizon and it stopped at the spire of the town to which the military mission, confided to him by Wallenstein, summoned him. What would he not have given to see a squadron come flying thence! But Armand-Louis had already drawn his sword.

"You have said a duel," spoke John of Werth as he drew his. "If I down you am I free? If I fall can Captain Steinwald, my escort, go upon his way?"

"I swear it to you," answered Armand-Louis.

"Then to arms!"

Armand-Louis and John of Werth leaped to the ground, and, having chosen a spot at the middle of the bridge, they crossed swords.

Renaud stood behind Armand-Louis, the statuesque Captain Steinwald behind John of Werth. Magnus and Carquefou kept guard at either end of the bridge.

Between the two combatants there was the same hate, the same youth, the same ardor, the same strength. Each sword-point sought the other's heart; not a word, not a cry, not a sigh. Naught was heard but the clash of steel against steel. The chances looked equal. Neither

one nor the other of the adversaries weakened; neither one nor the other recoiled. But Armand-Louis' duels with Renaud and Count Pappenheim in the past had not been in vain. No feint was strange to him, no trick was there, no attack, that he did not know.

A flame of anger crossed the visage of John of Werth. For an instant he fell off guard and the sword of Armand-Louis, swift as a dart, pierced his arm through. The hand of the Bavarian opened and his weapon dropped on the bridge. Armand-Louis leaped forward to seize it, when John of Werth, snatching it up with his unwounded hand, pitched it into the river.

"Perish the sword which betrayed me," he shouted. "Perish the sword-knot!"

With one spring Armand-Louis leaped over the parapet after the sword. They saw him sink in the whirling stream and then suddenly reappear, holding in his hand the weapon with its sword-knot. With the other hand he swam and soon reached the shore.

John of Werth, pale with rage, was holding his wounded arm.

"You are free, sir," said Armand-Louis.

Then he leaped astride his horse, which Magnus had brought to him, and they galloped off, leaving John of Werth standing in the middle of the bridge. In his mad course towards the Swedish line he pressed the wet sword-knot to his heart, saying:

"Thank God, Adrienne is mine!"

When Armand-Louis and Renaud reached the camp of Gustavus Adolphus, Arnold of Brahé had just preceded them with the two young ladies in charge.

The Marquis of Pardaillan was stronger than his sickness and was in the presence of the king. Not having heard from the two adventurers, nor from Adrienne and Diana, his only hope now was to avenge them or die.

Suddenly a great noise was heard outside of his tent, and the sound of those two loved voices made his heart leap. As he stood up Adrienne and Diana fell into his arms.

"Both still alive!" cried the old man, as the tears streamed down his cheeks.

"My Lord, Marquis," said Renaud, "I was not to re-appear before you until I brought your daughter with me. Have I kept my word?"

"My son, embrace me!" said the old man.

"Sweet heaven!" exclaimed Renaud, his knees trembling. But the father gave room to the gentleman and the soldier immediately.

"Gentlemen," said the Marquis of Pardaillan, "the affairs of Sweden must be preferred to the affairs of the family. Let us give up these few hours to prayer and rest. To-morrow the God of war will decide the fate of Gustavus Adolphus. I also will be a horse."

CHAPTER XXXII.

VAE VICTIS.

The camp presented a scene of suppressed agitation. The squadrons and battalions were taking their rank in the order of battle. The men knew that on the morrow the King of Sweden was to measure himself with Wallenstein. The officers came and went giving orders. Cannons were rolled in place and stalwart veterans examined their arms.

Armand-Louis hastened to the presence of Gustavus Adolphus, who received him with open arms. He was struck with the grave demeanor of the king.

"I bring back to you what is left of the La Guerche Dragoons," said Armand-Louis after he had informed the King in a few words of the state of his affairs.

"So much the better," answered Gustavus Adolphus. "We cannot have too many good soldiers."

"Do you think, sir, that Wallenstein is more redoubtable than Count Tilly? The town of Lutzen will be another Leipzig for Your Majesty. It will baptise a new victory."

"God is master. Grant that He may hear you!"

Then with a firm hand Gustavus Adolphus traced to Armand-Louis the plan of the positions occupied by the two armies.

"I am not in a condition to wait till winter any more than Wallenstein," explained the king. "I offer him battle and he accepts, so as not to merit the reproach which has been cast up to him since Nuremberg, that he did not dare to measure arms with the King of Sweden. Wallenstein is a great general. Every combination that the genius of man can invent to assure victory to his flag he will discover. How many who are alive to-day will sleep in eternity to-morrow! You will remain near me, La Guerche."

"That means I will be in the most dangerous place. I thank you, sire, for this privilege."

Then, leaving the King's tent, Armand-Louis sought Arnold of Brahé to have news of the Duke of Lauenbourg.

"He has been gone two days," Arnold said.

"God grant that he may never return," cried Armand-Louis.

Some hours still separated the night from the moment when the great battle should begin. Armand-Louis left the camp to see Adrienne once more. As he was passing from it he met Magnus. The veteran was shadowing a man of gaunt appearance who was urging onward a horse of thin and half-starved build.

"If Magnus is still the man I knew him to be," said the old reiter, "it is my opinion that I saw the scowl of this rascal in the inn where Lord Mattheus wore the cloak of a monk."

"What matters it to thee?" said Armand-Louis.

"It is said in Africa that jackals go before hyenas in search of prey. Master Innocent might well be the spy of a bandit called Jacobus, whose angular profile and red beard I fancied I recognized when you left to go to the king. I want to talk with him about this."

But just when Magnus was about to turn, Master Innocent plied his spurs and the lean and half-starved horse galloped away like a thunderbolt. In a few moments he was quite out of reach.

"Ha!" murmured Magnus. "This serves to give my suspicions bottom. We'll see the hyena after the jackal."

"Well," answered Armand-Louis, "are we not here to receive him?"

While all in the Swedish camp was being made ready for the decisive action of the morrow, Wallenstein was in conference with Duke Francis-Albert, who informed him of the resolution of Gustavus Adolphus.

"Twice have I lost twenty-four hours in seeking you in the mountains between Cambourg and Weissenfels and along the shores of the Saale. In your turn do not lose an hour. The King of Sweden will be upon you to-morrow."

"Are you quite sure of this?" cried Wallenstein, leaping to his feet. "Yesterday the king was marching on Saxony."

"He has struck his camp at Naumbourg and is advancing by forced marches on Weissenfels."

"Is Count Kolloredo there?"

"He holds the fort, but that will not prevent the passing of King Gustavus Adolphus. Believe me, my lord, the battle is inevitable."

"It will be inevitable only if I consent to accept it."

"And if Your Highness refuse, his enemies will be assured that Your Highness does not dare meet the King of Sweden in open country."

"They say that," cried Wallenstein, flushing.

"They who know you not, my lord, take a malicious pleasure in spreading such calumnies."

"How many soldiers has Gustavus Adolphus in hand?"

"Twenty thousand."

"That is more than I have to oppose him."

"But you are Wallenstein and you command. Besides you have the advantage of position. If you retreat, do you not fear to lose by such a retreat the prestige of twenty victories? The King of Sweden has attacked you, it seems to me, in your entrenchments at Nuremberg. Has the conqueror of Tilly been able to inflict a scratch upon you?"

"'Tis true; but consider my ill-luck. Yesterday by my order and in the conviction that I was in a place where the campaign was ended, Count Pappenheim left me and marched on Mortzbourg."

"He must be called back in all haste. He cannot be gone above seven or eight leagues."

"Will you undertake to reach him?"

"Yes; and when the Count has been brought back to camp, I will hurry to rejoin the King of Sweden."

"Go then. There's the order, signed and sealed by me. I will confer with my generals."

But it was less Count Kolloredo or Piccolimini that the Duke of Friedland went to consult than the Astrologer Seni.

The conversation just held with the Duke of Lauen-

bourg was far from determining Wallenstein to accept the battle threatened by Gustavus Adolphus. It was his policy to temporize, and though moved by the arguments by whose aid the astute Francis-Albert had pricked his pride, he resolved to hang his resolution on the answer of the stars.

The astrologer Seni occupied a house on the summit of a terrace which had been built by the laborers of the camp and a kind of tower in which the clever man lived among his instruments. The walls were covered with cabalistic figures and algebraic calculations.

When Wallenstein entered in the tower Seni was studying the stars. At the sight of the firmament, resplendent with stars, above all at the sight of the silent man, who was tracing on a sheet of paper signs and figures, which he could not understand, the general, whom one hundred cannons discharged at one time could not make quiver, trembled from head to foot.

"What say the planets?" he asked, in a voice of emotion.

Previously Seni had received a visit from Duke Francis-Albert, nevertheless he was not in the habit of compromising himself by giving categorical answers.

"Mars was very red to-night," he said. "The earth will soon drink blood."

"'Tis a dew which falls almost every eve in this tempestuous weather. But have you cast your eyes upon the star of the King of Sweden?" asked the Duke of Friedland.

"It was veiled yesterday; this morning even more so. But it was not entirely hidden. Saturn threatens it, also Jupiter. I have made my calculations from the conjunction of those stars. A great event is at hand."

"Ah!"

"Behold your star, my lord; what a brilliance it has despite the approach of Mercury, the inimical star of which, Sirius, who protects you, combats the evil influence. Truth is read in the heavens in characters of fire. Behold that passing star, which dies. Lo, another appears! A third, more resplendent, springs from the depths of the firmament. In its course it skims the war-

like Lion and the Ram, friend of battles. Let him have heed."

"Who? Explain!" cried Wallenstein breathlessly.

"The star which is the master of his life pales. The heavens have said it and repeat it. The Ides of November shall be fatal to Gustavus Adolphus!"

"And to-day is the first of November!" cried Wallenstein, his breast heaving.

Seni traced some figures and parabola on his paper. Wallenstein stared at him with bated breath.

"Yes, fatal; exceeding fatal!" repeated Seni. "The sun set in purple. How sombre wert thou then, star of Gustavus Adolphus!"

As he left the house of Seni, Wallenstein, half conquered, yet still hesitating, met a man for whom he had been searching. He recognized the equerry of Madame d'Igomer.

"Ah, my lord," said this man, as he knelt and presented to him a scarf still wet and soiled with mud.

"Good God! Dead!" cried Wallenstein.

The equerry arose and with bared brow narrated to the Duke of Friedland the manner in which the Baroness of Igomer had lost her life. Only this bit of silk had the cruel waters yielded. Now Thecla slept forevermore beneath the weeds and grasses of the marsh.

Wallenstein heard the equerry's recital with a sad and grave attention.

"Ah!" he roared at length, "let the earth drink blood. I've paid my holocaust!"

Then summoning the generals of the Imperial army, Isolani, Kollaredo, Piccolimini and Terzki, he said:

"Gentlemen, to-morrow we fight Gustavus Adolphus."

All preparations were made within the few hours which lay between now and daylight. Deep trenches, bristling with stakes ran along each side of the road from Weissenfels to Leipzig between the two armies. The Imperial troops, divided into five brigades, took position at three hundred paces from this road, the left wing against the canal which joins the Elster with the Saale, and the batteries quickly established dressed their cannons all on rising ground.

Meanwhile the Duke of Lauenbourg and Captain Jacobus were galloping in the night in the pursuit of Count Pappenheim. A burning village, which cast sinister flames athwart the heavens, served to light them. They understood that the terrible general had passed here.

At the first streaks of dawn Gustavus Adolphus leaped into his saddle. Still suffering from an ill-healed wound, he wore in lieu of his cuirass a close coat of buff and a surtout of cloth. Pale, but with eye undimmed and brow erect, he rode along the front of his army of warriors and devotees.

At view of him a thousand cheers rent the air, which reverberated even to the camp of Wallenstein.

"Soldiers!" cries the king, "lift your souls to God, the giver of victory!"

He kneels on the ground, uncovers and prays.

The army kneels in a mass, and twenty thousand brave voices intone a religious chant, which is accompanied by the music of the regiment. A great fog covers the plain and the prayer of these valiant men, half of whom are going to their death, rises up in the mist.

Armand-Louis and the Marquis of Pardaillan, suddenly animated by the fire of youth, followed the king. Armand-Louis looked everywhere for Renaud. He was not to be seen in the ranks of the dragoons.

Armand-Louis questioned Magnus.

"This morning M. de Chaufontaine seemed very much interested in a new buff coat, which he was trying," replied Magnus. "Carquefou was trying one also of the same form."

At this moment a ray of sunlight burst over the plain, the fog rose like a curtain and the two armies beheld each other separated by the highway.

A jet of flame shot out from a battery placed on a hill in the midst of the Imperial army.

"God is with us!" cried the Swedes.

"Jesus and Mary!" replied the Imperialists.

The battle had begun.

While Gustavus Adolphus was pointing with his sword to the battery, enveloped in smoke and flames, which

must be taken, Wallenstein was gazing in the direction in which Count Pappenheim had ridden away the day before. The road was white and naked even to the horizon.

"Will he arrive in time?" murmured the field marshal, glancing now upon the masses of Swedes, who had already fought their way to the first trench along the road.

The muskets shrieked all along the line and the cannon thundered. Balls and bullets dealt destruction in their path.

The fury of the attack was equalled only by the obstinacy of the defense. Neither army would yield. The yards of ground conquered, foot by foot, by the Swedes, were almost immediately retaken by the Imperialists. Whole ranks fell in the carnage only to be replaced by new combatants fighting like devils. Everywhere, when a regiment wavered the captains rushed ahead and their presence inspired new force and spirit in the men. The dead were no longer counted. The road which separated the two armies had been captured and lost three times.

While Gustavus Adolphus was directing his impetuous charges from the centre to the left wing and from the left wing to the right of his army, Armand-Louis, now alone with Magnus, now with some dozens of dragoons, had never left the king's side. Athwart the smoke he once caught a glimpse of Renaud, who was issuing from the midst of a Bavarian battalion he had routed. He fancied he saw Gustavus Adolphus in person and behind this new Gustavus Adolphus still another. The close coat and surtout were exactly alike.

"What madness is this?" said Armand-Louis, while the balls whistled around his head.

"'Tis a trick," replied Renaud. "A deserter informed me that certain captains of the Imperial army wished to attack the king. Five or six of us have adopted his costume. If fortune wills it, I will be the one to fall."

Meanwhile the king aimed by a decisive blow to break the centre of the enemy, where Wallenstein fought in person. He gathered about him several Finland battalions and, his sword aloft, he dashed them on to the charge.

All yielded before him and his rush makes him master

of the batteries that crest the road. Wallenstein, still impassive, retreats, surrounded by the vanquished. His line of operation is broken, but so long as one regiment lasts he does not believe the battle lost.

Had Seni not said that the Ides of November would be fatal to the King of Sweden?

But now a fearful uproar bursts forth on the road. A terrible confusion ensues in the ranks. The two armies seem to be run over by a whirlwind, which annihilates the Swedish lines.

Gustavus Adolphus pauses and looks into the distance. A fearful shout tears the air, springing from the midst of this whirlwind.

"Jesus and Mary!"

It is the cry of the Imperialists, and eight regiments of cuirassiers appear dealing death in their path.

At the same instant a man covered with powder passes near Wallenstein and flings forth these words:

"Count Pappenheim!"

Then, continuing his course, he attains the thick of the Swedish squadrons and hastening to the side of the king, he shouts:

"Sire, Count Pappenheim is arrived. Your left wing is broken."

"Damn you!" mutters Armand-Louis, as he recognizes Francis-Albert.

The king had signalled to Armand-Louis.

"Gallop," he said, "and fetch Duke Bernard of Weimar with his reserve. He will find me before Pappenheim."

Armand-Louis leaps off in one direction, Gustavus Adolphus in the other, and followed by the Duke of Lauenbourg.

A sinister cavalier gallops in their shadow. If Carquefou should meet him he would recognize Captain Jacobus despite the red cloak which he wears.

"At last, thou'rt here," said the king to the Duke of Lauenbourg. "Why have I not seen thee for two days?"

"Ah, Sire," replied the duke, "now I leave you no more."

The flames had beacons him the preceding night to Halle, which General Pappenheim had consigned to fire.

Scarcely had he been made aware of the order, which the sombre ally of the Imperialists bore, than the Grand-Marshal had his drums beating and clarions sounding. But cavalry and infantry were mad in the lust of pillage. Only eight regiments of cuirassiers answered his summons, and at the head of these Pappenheim had galloped to the battle.

It was lost. He arrives and wins it back. His sword works prodigies and his cavalry, accustomed to conquer with him, meet the Blue Regiment, the most staunch of the Swedish infantry.

They formed a very living wall; a wall bristling with pikes and muskets; but the cuirassiers ten times repulsed are lashed back to the charge for the eleventh time and the wall falls.

To the Blue Regiment succeeds the Yellow. The torrent of cavaliers attack it and heap themselves on its flanks without being able even to scratch it. Pappenheim flings himself into the thickest of the conflict. His cavaliers follow him and pass.

The Yellow Regiment is no more.

"Gustavus Adolphus, where art thou?" roars Pappenheim, brandishing his sword that flows with blood.

He perceives a cavalier who resembles the king and charges upon him. A few terrific blows and the cavalier, wounded to death, falls back on the crupper of his horse.

"Ah, 'tis not the king!" says Pappenheim disdainfully, and he plunges forward, roaring, "Gustavus Adolphus, where art thou?"

On his way he ploughs the broken ranks of the Swedish army as a mighty drill ploughs a field of brushwood.

This great tumult attracts the king, who from afar sees the rout of his men and then apprehends that the Duke of Friedland will retake the offensive.

The cavalier in the red cloak, who shadows him, approaches Francis-Albert.

"The army wavers. If the king dies it is beaten. Strike, then," he mutters.

The Duke of Lauenbourg raises a heavy pistol.

"Ah, I dare not," he says.

At this juncture, Gustavus Adolphus, in his unbridled

course, passed near a platoon of Imperial musketeers. Francis-Albert feigned to be carried away by his horse and galloped along their front.

"The man riding ahead," he said, "is the king. Fire!"

Three muskets are raised and fire. One ball strikes Gustavus Adolphus, breaking his left arm, which falls limp to his side.

"God's curse!" muttered Francis-Albert, seeing that the king did not fall.

Armand-Louis galloped up now and said to the king:

"Sire, Duke Bernard follows me."

"Forward!" replied the king.

A body of cuirassiers suddenly separates him from Armand-Louis, who charges on them with thirty dragoons.

Gustavus Adolphus strove to reach Count Pappenheim, but pain and the loss of blood were weakening him. The old ill-healed wound reopened. He grew pale and swayed in his saddle.

"Oh, if at least my brave soldiers do not see me fall!" he murmured.

"Strike now!" repeats Jacobus in the ear of the Duke of Lauenbourg, as Gustavus Adolphus moves away slowly.

Francis-Albert hesitates.

"Well," retorted the captain, "what you do not know how to do, I will do."

Then raising his pistol, the dog fires. Gustavus Adolphus utters a cry. His trembling hand seeks to grip the saddle, but he falls to earth.

"Brother," said the king to the duke, who stares at him in terror, "I am ready to die. Preserve thy days!"

"Now, Sire, dost recognize me?" asked Jacobus, who had just left his men, "thou didst degrade me. I kill thee!"

A terrible cry causes him to raise his glance. Armand-Louis had seen all and at the head of his cavaliers is fighting frantically to come up with him.

"Help! Help!" cried Jacobus. "Gustavus Adolphus is dead!"

One hundred cuirassiers and one hundred Imperial musketeers run hither. The cavaliers, whom Jacobus has

filled with rage, fling themselves ahead and a combat, in which quarter is neither asked nor given, begins over the corpse of Gustavus Adolphus.

Duke Bernard of Weimar, summoned by Armand-Louis, had just met Count Pappenheim. To the Austrian cuirassiers are opposed the cuirassiers of Finland.

The torrent, which seemed a few moments before irresistible, recoils now.

The news that the king is dead spreads like a forest-fire through the ranks of the Swedish army. An outburst of rage is their reply, and like she-wolves from whom their cubs have been ravished, the companies rally and dash upon the enemy.

It is no longer a battle, but a duel; every man who bears a pike, a sword, or a musket seems to have a personal injury to avenge. Cavalry and infantry vie with each other in falling upon the Imperialists.

"Vengeance!" is now the army's cry.

Everything yields to this effort of desperation.

Wallenstein, leading the centre to the battle, jostled against General Horn and his old regiments.

"Ah," said he, "the soul of Gustavus Adolphus is with them."

This soul was incarnate in the manly visage of Duke Bernard. While the Swedes fought to kill and die, he urged them ahead to conquer, and mastering the batteries, which had kept Gustavus Adolphus so long in check, he thunderstruck the Imperial army.

Meanwhile the fury of the combat, which bloodied the corner of ground on which lay the body of Gustavus Adolphus, had not diminished in violence. Dead piled upon dead, and the wounded fell around them. Above this raging sea of the dying the head and arm of Pappenheim could be seen. He did not know that Gustavus Adolphus had fallen and still sought him.

While an equal rage animated the Imperialists to effect a breach in the soldiers of Armand-Louis and Renaud, the one redoubled his blows to attain Captain Jacobus, the other precipitated his in order to strike the Grand-Marshal of the Empire. In spite of the waves of enemies

which flung themselves upon them, Carquefou had managed to join his companions in arms. But his horse no longer obeyed the bit. Deceived by the close-coat of buff and the surtout of cloth Pappenheim dashed upon him.

"Here's my last hour!" murmured Carquefou, who braced himself intrepidly for the ordeal.

Almost immediately the horse of the Grand-Marshal, with its enormous breast-plate, dashed against the staggering mount of his adversary and sent him flying ten feet away.

"Hold on to thy saddle better," cried the German, laughing as he recognized Carquefou and shot past him.

While Carquefou was picking up the Shiverer and leaping to his feet the Marquis of Pardaillan charged upon Count Pappenheim, crying:

"Raise your sword!"

"Old man," replied the marshal, "the game is not equal."

Then, with the velocity of a stone let fly from a sling the blow he struck at the marquis tore the old man's sword from his grasp and drove a great gash into his arm.

"Where are the others? Get the wounded out of the way!" roars the Grand-Marshal.

Now Renaud managed to break the formidable circle of pistols and sabres which encompassed him and he rode up like a lion to Count Pappenheim.

"At last!" said the Grand-Marshal, as he recognized him.

They leap at each other like two bulls. Their swords meet with the swiftness of the sledge striking the anvil; and blows are parried as fast as dealt. The strife is remarkable in this, nevertheless, that the longer it lasts the more assured becomes the coolness and address of Renaud. Pappenheim, on the contrary, noting that his men were wavering all about him, wished to rally them and make himself known to animate them by his example. For an instant his eyes leave Renaud and standing in his stirrups, he cries:

"Close cuirassiers and forward!"

His lips had not yet regained their tight shut expression ere the sword of Renaud had slipped under his arm and pierced his shoulder.

A cry of rage burst from the throat of the Grand-Marshal. He would keep up the fight. His leaden arm makes a desperate effort to lift his weapon, but it falls limp to his side.

"Surrender!" cries Renaud.

But the cuirassiers, seeing the peril of their chief, a furious charge bears them between the combatants. The men of Duke Bernard and the dragoons of Armand-Louis fling themselves into the conflict.

What arquebuses, pistols and muskets still remained belched forth fire and Pappenheim, who persisted in refusing to retreat with his men, fell from his steed with two balls in his breast.

A company of cuirassiers closed in around him, and while they made a rampart of their bodies for their chief, some bore the Grand-Marshal far from the strife. His limp hand no longer held his sword.

"Ah, if he escapes me," cried Renaud, "this victory is no victory!"

When Gustavus Adolphus, struck with a mortal blow, fell from his saddle-bows, Duke Francis-Albert, seized by a mad terror, had taken flight. His terrified horse bore him up to the front of the Imperial army, and he shrieked in a kind of frenzy:

"The king is dead! The king is dead!"

Captain Jacobus, now afoot, sword in hand, raged around his dying victim.

Here musketeers and lansquenets fought for the effects of the king, his hat, riddled with bullets, his bloody close-coat, his scarlet sword, his tattered cloak.

Armand-Louis, who was followed by Magnus, M. de Saint-Paer, M. de Collonges and thirty dragoons, cut great breaches in this moving circle. Captain Jacobus caught sight of him and leaping astride of a horse, which had wandered from its fallen rider, he waved his stalwart arm in the air.

"'Tis too late," he cried. "The king is dead."

Then like an adder, which glides through thorns and brushwood, he launched into the thick of the Imperial squadrons.

But these squadrons, divided and broke by the repeated charges of the Swedes, wavered and opened on all sides. Whither Captain Jacobus galloped Armand-Louis pursued him. They shot like two arrows through the midst of the dispersed battalions. Now the Huguenot had almost overtaken him, now the captain evaded him. Thrice had the sword of Armand-Louis ploughed the crupper of the captain's mount, thrice a chance separated them.

Thus they passed through the army and the chase ceased not.

Beside a brook, fringed with willows, Captain Jacobus perceived a bevy of eight or ten disbanded Croatsians.

"There's a Swedish general," he cried, "ten ducats to those who kill him."

The Croatsians were about to charge upon Armand-Louis, but they saw M. de Saint-Paer and M. de Collonges, flanked by five or six dragoons, galloping toward him at a fearful speed. The Croatsians turned bridle and crossed the brook. Unhappily rapid as had been their intervention, it had allowed Captain Jacobus to gain the opposite bank. A thin, pale man came out of the shade of the willows, holding by the bit a lank horse. Captain Jacobus leaped upon this steed, abandoning his former mount, while Master Innocent glided into the thick bush which bordered the brook, wherein his stealthy flight left no more trace than that of a fox.

Armand-Louis gave vent to a yell of rage and would have kept on in pursuit of Captain Jacobus.

Magnus calmly stopped him and pointing with Baliverne to the fleeing rascal, he said:

"His horse has wings. Do not follow him. Yesterday I discovered the abode of Master Innocent, Captain Jacobus will certainly return to it. But as sure as Magnus is a man and has never deceived you, he will bring you face to face with that ruffian!"

"Thou promisest it?"

"I swear it!"

"Well, I swear in my turn that this hand will not touch the hand of Adrienne before it has punished the murderer of the king!"

Then, ramming his sword into its scabbard, Armand-Louis turned bridle.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE KING'S AVENGED.

As he was slowly retracing his steps with the dragoons grouped about M. de Saint-Paer and M. de Collonges, Armand-Louis met Renaud, flanked by Carquefou. They were galloping at the side of an officer in the uniform of the Croatian cavalry and halted on the instant.

"This man has promised to conduct me to the abode of Count Pappenheim," said Renaud. "If he keeps his promise he will receive one hundred pistoles; if he fails, the ball in this pistol will crack his skull."

"To thee the Grand-Marshal of the Empire," replied Armand-Louis, "to me Captain Jacobus."

The two brothers in arms exchanged a vigorous grip of the hands and their countenances glowed with the fire of an irrefragable resolution.

"My horse is fresh," interposed M. de Collonges. "I borrowed him from an officer of Wallenstein's body-guard in exchange for a thrust of my sword. I will go then and join my fortune with that of the Marquis of Chaufontaine. M. de Saint-Paer will remain with our chief. Thus each of us will have his share of the common work."

The dragoons divided into two bands, the better mounted men rallying around M. de Collonges.

"Farewell, Baliverne," said Carquefou to Magnus, "I feel as though the Shiverer is in danger of death, but she has also a little debt to pay. If we die in company on our way forgive us in remembrance of the feelings that were not stinted by us."

Shortly afterward Renaud's troop vanished in the distance.

When Armand-Louis reappeared on the field of battle the day was ended. All to be discerned in the dubious

light of evening was some of the wounded dragging themselves over the ground to reach the ambulances.

Ten thousand slain lay upon the field. A funereal silence enveloped this mighty multitude, such a brief while before agitated by the storm-wind of all passions of violence. In the midst of the shadows, which grew more dense every minute, Armand-Louis, M. de Saint-Paer and Magnus searched for the body of the king.

While they were wandering silently in the confused ranks of Imperialists and Swedes, they fancied they descried a black figure which came and went in the night like a phantom.

"Can that be Captain Jacobus already?" murmured Magnus.

Armand-Louis approached the figure. A woman's outlines loomed upon his gaze and raising her veil she returned his regard.

"Do you not recognize me?" she said.

"Margaret!"

"Yes, Margaret who weeps and will not be comforted. Everywhere the king went, I have gone. To Leipzig; to the passage of the Lech; to Nuremberg! He was at Lutzen this morning; I also was there. He fought, I prayed. God has not willed that Germany should know the hero who rescued her from slavery. But if his soul is above, at least his mortal remains should be brought back to Sweden."

"'Tis an hour that I have been searching for him who was Gustavus Adolphus. Alas, who can say what has become of him?"

"Follow me. If you find him not, I shall find him."

Margaret pressed onward with a firm tread through the holocaust of piled dead. Her face was hard and cold as marble.

"Ah, to think that I have seen her happy and beautiful!" thought Armand-Louis.

The daughter of Abraham Cabeliau at length reached a mound of corpses grouped in a circle. The earth was sodden with blood and covered with the fragments and remains of arms.

It was a heap of cuirassiers and musketeers, riddled

with wounds, mutilated, disembowelled, decapitated; the severed heads beside their trunks grinned in a final glare of furious hate.

Margaret searched in this gruesome pile of unrecognizable dead, torn by the hoofs of a thousand horses.

Suddenly she sank to her knees and lifting in her hands a head cold and ghastly, she said:

"'Tis here!"

So much of tears and anguish was in this cry that Magnus turned away his gaze and wept.

Then Margaret stood up and thrusting back the long black veil, which covered her like a shroud, her eyes bathed in tears, her face on fire, she shrieked:

"And he who killed this hero lives perchance. God of heaven, where is thy justice!"

"Yes, madam," said Armand-Louis, seizing her hand, "this man lives. But by the soul of him, who hears me no more, I swear to you that Gustavus Adolphus shall be avenged!"

Magnus brushed away his tears shamefacedly.

"To work then!" he cried. "Now that we have found the king's body, let it remain here for an hour. You, madam, go and pray under the shadow of those trees torn by shot. You are a woman. You may be seen and heard without exciting suspicion. How many widows and mothers weep this night. . . . You, M. de Saint-Paer, will lie in ambush below there behind that stretch of wall, where you may see all without being seen."

"What wilt thou do?" asked Armand-Louis.

"We are on the hunt. Let us snap the trap where the tiger should be taken."

"Ah, I understand. But if he should not come?"

"If he come not? Do you know a corner of Germany which the point of Baliverne cannot rummage? But be assured. The tiger has smelled blood. He will want to know whether his victim is dead."

"Good, Magnus, good. I will wait there in the shelter of that group of pines and twenty dragoons will wheel around the plain so that he cannot approach unseen or try to flee without being taken."

"Above all, not a word, not a stir; all around you great quarters of rock, trunks of felled trees, cottages in ruin, ramparts of corpses. Let them be just so many retreats in which you remain buried. But when you shall see me standing, and sword in hand, shouting, 'Gustavus Adolphus,' then rise all of you!"

"Then let me kill him," cried Armand-Louis.

The dragoons moved away. Margaret knelt on a knoll and all noise died on the plain.

Magnus, left alone, groped among the dead, and selecting a cloak of the Imperial colors, he slung it across his shoulders. He masked his features by rubbing powder and blood upon them. He put a dented helmet on his head and, unrecognizable to every eye, the veteran reiter trudged to the extreme limit of the field of battle.

Some few groans rose up from beneath him indicating the little life that still struggled to survive.

We will forsake Armand-Louis and Magnus for a moment to rejoin Renaud, who with M. de Collonges, launched in the pursuit of the Grand-Marshal of the Empire. The marquis determined to take this man dead or alive.

The Croatian, whose movements he scrutinized, galloped toward Leipzic. Here and there at rare intervals they passed groups of disbanded soldiers. Some of them dropped their arms at sight of the Swedish dragoons and scampered away, others flung themselves upon their knees in terror and begged for mercy. Yet others, faithless to the defeated flag and deprived of their chief, rallied around Renaud's escort, crying, "Long live Gustavus Adolphus!"

A poor house, whose half smashed windows shone in the darkness, appeared on one side of the road.

The Croatian stretched out his hand toward it.

"There it is," he said.

Shadows passed athwart the windows.

A group of bloody, mutilated, yet sword-bearing cuirassiers, kept guard around the house. At the approach of Renaud they lined up before the door.

"Lower arms!" said Renaud. "You are ten and we are thirty."

A robust voice was heard from within, Renaud recognizing it as that of Count Pappenheim.

"Let them enter!" he cried, "the enemy will see how the Grand-Marshal of the German Empire can die!"

Solemn and mute, the cuirassiers parted from before the door; and Renaud, followed by M. de Collonges, entered. Carquefou, the Shiverer in his hand, glided after them.

Count Pappenheim, without his cuirass, his head bare and already covered with the shadows of death, lay upon a miserable bed. Drops of blood oozed through the cloak thrown over his wound and dropped to the floor. His sword, broken through the middle, lay across his coverlet.

At sight of Renaud he raised himself on his elbow and saluted him with his hand, saying:

"'Tis a long distance from La Grande Fortelle to Leipzig. Since then we have met in some strange places. Be welcome to the last house in which I shall dwell."

Renaud uncovered. Carquefou lowered the Shiverer's point.

Then placing his hand upon the hilt of his broken sword, which he still kept by him, the Grand-Marshal added:

"If that is what you seek, wait a few moments, death will come and take me."

A shade of anger and despair crossed his visage.

"You have met me on ten fields of battle," he continued, "in respect for death, which hovers here, forget our long intimacy and answer as a soldier to him who was The Soldier. Your presence here tells me clearly enough that we have lost the battle. What remains of the Imperial army?"

"A few routed companies, some scattered squadrons."

"And the Duke of Friedland, our commander?"

"He has fled."

"If he lives, nothing is lost."

Count Pappenheim pulled himself up with an effort, not releasing the hilt of his sword.

"And Gustavus Adolphus?" he asked.

Renaud bowed his head and was silent.

"And Gustavus Adolphus?" repeated the dying man, sharply.

"He is dead," answered Renaud.

"Dead!" cried the Grand-Marshal, "the King of Sweden dead!"

Then lifting himself up, his hands all palsied and his face transfigured, he shrieked:

"Blessed be the God who lets me learn before my last hour that the implacable enemy of my religion and my country has lost his life! No! The battle is not lost if Gustavus Adolphus is dead! What matters it though fifty regiments have been broken like this sword! I die content. With him dead, Austria is triumphant!"

A violent knocking at the door interrupted him; a cuirassier entered followed by a courier who knelt on the ground, saying:

"I arrive from Madrid and the king, my master, has charged me to give this casket to the Grand-Marshal of the Empire."

Count Pappenheim took the casket and opened it. Soon the brilliant insignia of the famous Order of the Golden Fleece glittered in his trembling fingers. A kind of ecstasy illumined his countenance.

"At last!" he murmured.

A chill seized him.

"Farewell to glory! Farewell to earth!" he said.

A deathly pallor spread over his forehead; the scarlet cross appeared faintly between his eyebrows, then turning those eyes, in which the flame of life was flickering, upon Renaud, he murmured:

"I have found you always a man of war, brave and generous. In memory of the days when our swords crossed, allow my cuirassiers to bury me with these two souvenirs of here below."

"Your wish shall be accomplished!" said Renaud.

"Now, let God summon me," cried the Grand-Marshal. "I am ready."

Soon he yielded up his soul, holding under his cold hands the necklace of the Golden Fleece and the hilt of his sword."

"Yes, he was a soldier," murmured Renaud.

"God grant me such a death," said M. de Collonges, kneeling.

While these things were passing in the humble house, under whose roof the chance of war had driven one of the best warriors of the seventeenth century, to die, Armand-Louis, Magnus and M. de Saint-Paer were watching on the ghastly field of Lutzen.

The silence was profound; a slight sigh of wind complained in the branches of the trees; the moon, immobile in a pure sky, cast its gleam upon that field where slept the frozen multitude.

At times a wounded horse raised his head, uttered a long neigh and then became silent.

Night was now well advanced. Armand-Louis began to believe that Captain Jacobus would not come. About this time, old Magnus, who was prowling along the edge of the field, distinguished a man walking slowly and glancing about him. His tall form cast a long shadow on the ground. He held a sword in his hand.

"'Tis he!" murmured Magnus.

Then he directed his steps toward the captain, while feigning to be seeking something along the ground.

The captain stopped, drew a pistol from his belt and for a few minutes studied this unknown who was rambling among the dead.

"A marauder," he said to himself at last, as he rammed his pistol back in the folds of silk.

"Holloa, friend!" he cried.

Magnus raised his head, hesitated like one surprised and discontent, then advanced toward the captain, his hand on his swordhilt.

"Keep the toy in its place," quoth Captain Jacobus. "Thou'rt pillaging corpses; I want to find only one. So, let's not quarrel."

"Then, let's talk," replied Magnus, "but quickly. The day is not far off and it won't be pleasant to meet a Swedish patrol here."

"Hark thee! If thou aidest me to find him, whom I seek, there's more gold for you in this purse than you'll find in the pockets of a hundred officers."

"Speak."

"The man of whom I shall speak fell near a field of wheat, not far from a group of trees at a spot where the road makes a bend."

Magnus scratched his forehead.

"In a place something like that," he answered, "I saw an extraordinary pile of corpses. They lay like the strands of an unbound sheaf, one on top of the other. One of them wore a close-coat of buff with a gorget of steel; his left arm had been broken by a ball."

"Go thither, I follow thee," said the captain, seizing Magnus by the hand.

Without reply Magnus hastily took a path which cut the battlefield diagonally. The captain walked in his tracks at a sword's distance. His anxious glances sounded on every side the dubious clearness of the night; but naught stirred in the immense plain.

Further, the man walking before him had his sword in his scabbard.

Thus they neared a field of wheat, which had been trampled and torn by the ravages of the fearful struggle. Magnus pointed out to Captain Jacobus a group of five or six trees, and the road, whose white line bent here.

"Yes, 'tis there," murmured the adventurer.

A mass of bloody bodies carpeted the ground. Broken swords and muskets were strewn everywhere, and everywhere pale faces stared up at Heaven.

Magnus crossed the first circle of corpses and in the heart of this hecatomb he pointed to the body of the king. Then uncovering and in a voice of thunder he roared:

"Gustavus Adolphus!"

A man sprang up at this cry, then a second, then ten, then twenty and all, sword in hand, marched toward Magnus.

"Traitor!" cried Captain Jacobus, as he pulled his pistol and fired.

But the veteran had leaped aside and the ball passed within a few inches of his brow.

"Too soon and too late," said Magnus, coldly.

Armand-Louis and M. de Saint-Paer were now beside him, and around them a circle of dragoons. Escape was impossible.

Captain Jacobus recognized Armand-Louis and, standing behind him like a spectre, Margaret Cabeliau.

He flung his useless arms to the ground and crossing his arms on his breast, he said:

"Ah, an ambush as at La Grande Fortelle. The gentleman does the bandit's job."

Armand-Louis made a gesture, at which M. de Saint-Paer and Magnus moved back. Then the Huguenot faced the adventurer and said:

"I shall believe my duty but half done if I don't kill you. Raise your sword then, Captain Jacobus, and defend your life, for as true as my name is Armand-Louis of La Guerche, one of us will fall here never to rise."

The captain whipped out his rapier, then retreating a step, he asked:

"Is it fair play?"

"Fair play. You against me. One to one."

"Without pity or mercy? With dirk and sword?"

"With dirk and sword. Without quarter or pardon."

"And if I kill you?"

"You shall be free, my faith of a gentleman."

M. de Saint-Paer made a move forward.

"Allow me," interposed Armand-Louis. "This man belongs to me."

"Magnus is not a gentleman. He has promised nothing," said Magnus.

Captain Jacobus bent his blade as he glanced at the veteran and said with a disdainful air:

"Thou—thou'rt nothing."

"On guard and pray to God," cried Armand-Louis.

The steel crossed and the duel began.

Margaret on her knees held up the livid head of the king and turned it toward the combatants, as if she willed death to be the witness of this implacable struggle to avenge it.

This time Armand-Louis had to do with the most formidable jousting he had ever met. No feint or trick but Captain Jacobus knew it. He made of his sword and poniard an agile and living shield, whence shot out a thousand thrusts prompt as thunderbolts. A mist passed before the eyes of Magnus, who gripped tight the hilt of *Baliverne*.

But Armand-Louis parried every thrust and multiplied his own with a speed and precision that increased by resistance.

Naught was heard but the clash of steel and the short, hard breathing of the two men.

According as the adversaries changed their positions, Margaret turned the head of the dead king between her knees so that its pallid face might ever be fixed on Captain Jacobus.

Once the eyes of the adventurer met this terrible visage. He shuddered and the sword of Armand-Louis caught him full in the breast; but the blade met the fine mail of a close-coat of steel under the buff doublet and it snapped into pieces.

"Bandit!" cried Armand-Louis.

A snarl of ferocious joy answered him.

Magnus paled and brandished Baliverne; but at the moment when Jacobus, sure of victory, lunged at Armand-Louis, Margaret handed the latter a bloody sword.

"'Tis the sword of the king," she said, "kill that man!"

The arm of Captain Jacobus hesitated; the thrust destined for his foe was lost in space and almost immediately the point of a blade, whose force he had once felt, threatened him anew.

"Strike at his throat!" Magnus said in a sombre voice.

The duel recommenced more bitterly and stubbornly.

"Death of my life!" murmured the captain. "I must make an end of this."

He crouched back like a tiger and his play became more rapid and serried. They saw his white teeth gleam through his red moustache.

Soon some drops of blood appeared on the clothes of Armand-Louis, who had no steel armor to protect him. Twice the captain had torn his doublet. A smile parted his lips as he said:

"My sword is thirsty. Beware!"

He made a step and Magnus passed his hand across his sweat-soaked brow. But suddenly the sword of Armand-Louis shone like an arrow and pinked the adventurer in the shoulder, where his cuirass joined.

"Hell!" roared Jacobus, falling back.

Armand-Louis dropped his sword, leaped forward and while with his right hand he seized the left arm of the captain, with the swiftness of a lightning streak he planted his poniard full in the villain's throat with his left.

The shell of steel struck his gorget and a jet of black blood leaped on the arm of the conqueror.

"Justice is done!" said Armand-Louis.

At daybreak two troops of cavalry met on the Leipzig road. One was being conducted by Renaud of Chaufontaine, the other by Armand-Louis. The one had seen Count Pappenheim die; the other bore the body of King Gustavus Adolphus. Not long afterward the two gentlemen entered the abode of the Marquis of Pardaillan.

"Dost believe that the Shiverer may take some rest now?" asked Carquefou.

"Who knows! Baliverne is not tired," replied Magnus.

Adrienne and Diana awaited their sweethearts.

"A man dared to look upon you," said Renaud. "He is no more."

The Marquis of Pardaillan took Diana's hand and placed it in that of Renaud.

"Madame," said Armand-Louis, "the swordknot with which John of Werth adorned his blade is here on mine; and I have killed the man who raised his hand against the king."

"Madame de La Guerche," said the Marquis of Pardaillan, "kiss your husband."

(THE END)

R. ROLLER RICHARDSON.

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